Scott MacDonald

Exploring the New West

An Interview with James Benning

James Benning made his reputation as a major contributor to independent cinema in the 1970s with his depiction of the Midwest and his inventive uses of composition and sound image relationship in *11 x 14* and *One Way Boogie Woogie*, but he has continued to surprise us by confirming the accomplishments of his youth with decade after decade of interesting work. When I interviewed Benning in 1986, *American Dreams* (1984) and *Landscape Suicide* (1986) had made the 1980s nearly as memorable a decade for his work as the 1970s. But I could not have imagined that Benning's fiftieth birthday (he was born in 1942) would signal not just further accomplishment, but the beginning of the most remarkable era in his creative life.

Soon after Benning moved to California to teach at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, just north of Los Angeles, in 1988, he began to explore the American West with the same energy and inventiveness that had made his 1970s explorations of the Midwest so memorable. His *North on Evers* (1991), made in part as a way of coming to terms with his own—and America's—aging, now seems a précis of the remarkable series of films he has finished during the past dozen years. *North on Evers* is Benning's *Easy Rider*. It reveals two motorcycle trips across the United States during two successive summers, each from his home in the small town of Val Verde to New York City across the southern route, then back West by the northern route. The first trip is presented as a handwritten text that scrolls from right to left across the bottom of the screen; the second is documented in image and sound recorded a year later, as Benning revisits the places and people he had seen on the original trip. By the time Benning returns to Val Verde, he, and we, have seen not only something of America at the conclusion of the twentieth century, but dimensions of our shared history. Even if on some level Benning imagines his journey ending at the decaying spiral of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in the Great Salt Lake, he did in fact return to Val Verde, and the experience of making *North on Evers* seems to have reenergized and reconnected him to American geography and history.

In 1995, Benning completed *Deseret,* an exploration of the history and geography of Utah, just in time for the Utah's state centennial in 1996. Using a series of edited *New York Times* stories relating to Utah, narrated by Fred Gardner, Benning tracks the changes in the way Utah has been perceived by America's Eastern Establishment. Each story is accompanied by the imagery and sounds of a different location in Utah, so that as we become more familiar with the history of the region, called "Deseret" by the original Mormons, we become more fully aware of the geographic diversity of Utah—and, by the conclusion of *Deseret,* of a variety of ongoing threats to the state's environment and ecology. The intricate formal design of the film trains viewers to look at Benning's consistently elegant imagery of Utah in more and more complex and subtle ways, and helps them realize the many ways that history inscribes itself into landscape.

Benning's fascination with Utah led him to the Four Corners area—where Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona meet—and to his next project, *Four Corners* (1997). *Four Corners* focuses on the meeting of the north/south and east/west borders of four states as an implicit grid against which Benning

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can chart the movements through time and space of the various peoples that have created the history of the Four Corners region: the Native Americans—especially the Anasazi, the Navajo, and the Zuni—and the European Americans who settled and often plundered the region. *Four Corners* is rigorously organized into four identical sections, each made up of three different forms of information. First, we read 80 seconds of visual text, white on black, that reviews the life of a particular artist—Claude Monet; Alabama folk painter Moses Tolliver; an imaginary Native American painter; and Jasper Johns—leading up to the creation of a particular artwork, which is then presented in a single, continuous shot, accompanied by a voiceover that outlines a particular dimension of history relevant to the Four Corners area. The first section details the story of Richard Wetherell, who "discovered" the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde and sold Indian artifacts to museums until he was murdered by a Navajo; the second offers the history of Milwaukee and Benning's youth there; the third describes the history of Native Americans in the Four Corners region; and the fourth tells the story of Herman Dodge Benally, a Navajo who was killed by high school students in Farmington, New Mexico, in 1974. The third part of each section is a series of thirteen 50-second shots of a location related to the previous history: Chaco Canyon, Milwaukee's South Side, Mesa Verde, Farmington.

Four Corners was followed by *Utopia* (1998), in which Benning recycled the soundtrack from *Ernesto Che Guevara, the Bolivian Journal* (1997) by Richard Dindo. Dindo's track is accompanied by imagery recorded along and near the border of California and Sonora, Mexico—Benning's way of relating Guevara's quest for a more equitable world in South American to the history and current struggles along the U.S./Mexico border, and of providing still another rumination on the paradox of the beauty of Western geography and the troubled history of this region.

In 1999, Benning completed *El Valley Centro,* what was to become the first section of a trilogy of films about California. Each part of the Trilogy—*Los* (2000) and *Sogobi* (2001) are the others—is made up

Courtesy James Benning

The motorcycle and text from *North on Evers* (1991)

of 35 two-and-a-half-minute shots. *El Valley Centro* focuses on California's Central Valley, between the Sierra Nevada and the Coastal Range, where a considerable percentage of America's food is produced; *Los,* on the Los Angeles area; and *Sogobi* (the title is Shoshoni for "earth"), on what remains of original California after centuries of still ongoing agricultural and industrial development. At least as of the writing of this introduction, Benning asks that the California Trilogy be screened in its entirety, as a mega-event (each 90-minute film is separated from the next by a 15-minute break)—a way of subtly modeling the reorganization of time necessary for coming to grips with the environmental challenges that face us, not only in California, but across the nation and around the world. The unusually patient form of the California Trilogy has instigated a further film, *13 Lakes* (2004), a series of 11-minute shots of 13 American lakes.

In recent decades, Benning's most responsive audience seems to be in Europe, where his films are regularly seen at festivals and by television audiences, and where there is enough interest in Benning to have inspired a feature-length documentary, *James Benning—Circling the Image* (2003), by Reinhard Wulf (Wulf documents Benning during the shooting of portions of *13 Lakes*). While Benning continues to tour the United States with his films, as he has since the 1970s, there seems surprisingly little awareness of the accomplishments of his "Westerns," especially in the East. Even a high-profile event like the "Views from the Avant-Garde" screenings, held annually as a sidebar to the New York Film Festival, has never acknowledged these films, nor has the festival itself. Benning's commitment to feature-length films that are not narrative melodramas seems to have located his work in a no-man's land exhibition-wise, at least in parts of his native land, despite the fact that these films are remarkably accessible and engaging, as well as consistently inventive and insightful. Their value for students in academic fields such as American Studies, Environmental Studies, and Cultural Studies could be considerable, if only those who teach in these fields were aware of Benning's work. One can only hope

Courtesy James Benning

Moosehead Lake, Maine, from *13 Lakes* (2004)

that, in time, Benning will have the American audience his films deserve.

This interview began in March 1996, in Utica, New York, where Benning and I talked about his 1990s films up through *Deseret*. We talked again in April 2002, when the Tucson Film Festival presented the California Trilogy. I have also frequently emailed questions to Benning, which he has been kind enough to answer.

SCOTT MACDONALD: *One way of thinking about the development of landscape painting in this country, especially on the part of the people writing about it recently, is that it was exactly at the moment when the original American landscape seemed in danger of totally disappearing that it was recognized as something worth holding onto. In* Deseret *you're playing with that theme too, as you made clear when you were talking about the structure of the film at the screening tonight, and its relationship to Smithson's* Spiral Jetty *and the concept of entropy.*
JAMES BENNING: Absolutely.

The film begins with a beautiful image of a butte, but by the end, we've moved into a sensibility where we're no longer sure whether we're looking at a beautiful landscape or an environmental disaster.
People living in southern Utah, one of the most beautiful places in the world, are still dying of cancer from nuclear testing in Nevada decades ago. They became the "down-winders." A piece of landscape that looks beautiful can become the opposite of beauty.

But there's something more marvelous about those landscapes than all of that, something very mysterious. Out in the middle of a Western landscape, where nobody's around, there seems to be some answer, a feeling of getting back to something that's much more real than what we generally experience. I think Robert Frank expresses it really well in his video, *Home Improvements* [1985], when he points the camera out his window in Nova Scotia, and says, "The answer's out there, but every time I look out, it's different; it's always changing." I think maybe that's what it is: a search for an answer *out there,* where every moment is different from the moment before. Landscape is always changing in very subtle ways and sometimes in very dramatic ways, but it has to be *experienced*.

It's quite remarkable to get up at five o'clock in the morning, when it's already 80 degrees, and walk eight or ten miles through the canyon lands to where the Colorado and Green rivers meet, to be out there all by yourself, and it's very hot and you're wet with sweat and you hear the wind blow down those rivers and you look down and see one red river and one green river mixing together—there's something special about that moment. But basically the experience is indescribable—you have to *do it*.

And then there's also the feeling of being out of water and hurrying back eight or ten miles; it puts you on the edge of life in a way, and you start to think about the struggles of life in the past, when people were trying to live out there without the conveniences we have today. Those are the same conveniences that seem to be destroying Utah now: the roads and cars and the dumping of nuclear waste from power plants.

Deseret *is unlike some of your early films, where the structure is absolutely clear.*
When I started to make *Deseret,* it was going to be an hour long; the first half was going to be 30 one-minute shots, of 30 different landscapes, and the last half was going to be 30 different people, each talking for one minute: they would represent the variety of things that I thought were happening in Utah. But in the making of the film, the plans completely changed, and it seemed more practical to use newspaper articles to talk about the issues I was interested in.

Could you describe the structure of the finished film?
The film uses 94 different *New York Times* stories about Utah, written between 1852 and 1992. Actually, I found many more stories than the ones I used. Knowing something about Utah history, I was able to look for *Times* stories about particular events, but eventually I'm sure I xeroxed at least 90 percent of all the *Times* stories that dealt with Utah.

I reduced the stories I had collected down to a manageable 94, and then edited each story down to eight to ten sentences, all the while trying to be true to the language of the time, so that you would have a feel for the journalese of each story. Because of the evolution of journalism, the length of sentences tended to get shorter over time.

The visual structure was based on using one shot for each sentence in each story that you hear read by the narrator, plus one shot *between* each pair of stories, which is presented without narration. Those spaces between the stories get shorter and shorter as the film goes along: the shot between the first two stories is 15 feet long and the shot between the last two stories is only three feet long.

The shortening of the sentences in the stories, and the shorter and shorter shots between narrated stories,

cause the whole film to speed up, which corresponds with the historical realities of journalism. In the early days, stories from Utah wouldn't reach New York for three or four months. If you pay attention to the dates of the stories (the date of each story is superimposed over the first shot in each story), you'll see that, early on, the writers will be talking about something that happened in January in a story dated May: it took that long for the story to get back East. Of course, later the gap becomes a day or two days, and right now it's less than a day.

How did you decide which stories you'd use?
I found many stories from early on when Utah was still a territory, because the United States government was preoccupied with trying to wrest control of the territory away from the Mormons. In 1857, troops were sent to Utah, and there are many stories about the war against the Mormons. If you study the structure of the film, you'll see that there are lots of stories from the 1850s, and lots of stories at the end from more recent years. I purposely did that so you could compare the differences, and the history lent itself to that: the more interesting stories really did happen in the 1850s and in the 1980s and 1990s.

Anything else you want to say about the structure of Deseret*?*
Well, one shot in each story actually shows where the particular story you're hearing took place.

I also decided *not* to develop any sequence of juxtapositions that would suggest a theme—seasonal change, or moving toward the mountains, or whatever. I wanted the images themselves to *completely* keep changing.

I *was* very careful when I arranged the film. I mounted one frame from each shot onto a slide and used the slide projector as a poor man's Avid, projecting the slides to decide which images should go next to each other. I was able to study each slide juxtaposed with each sentence, and could be very careful about the way each image would code each bit of language, and how each bit of language would reinterpret the way you looked at that landscape. I wanted the texts and the images to talk to each other.

The whole point of the structure was to create a space between those two aspects of the film that *you* have to complete. When you watch the film, especially the first time, it tends to wash over you, so that you don't really notice all that much about the juxtapositions between image and text, but I do hope I've created something like a narrative space between the two and that some people will see the film often enough to be able to explore the dimensions of that space.

In one sense, the imagery and the narration are analogous. The camera is mounted on a tripod and the shots are very formally arranged—a correlative to the formal delivery of the narration of the stories, to Fred Gardner's monotone narration. Was that your thinking in choosing Gardner as narrator?
I've used narrators before, both in *Used Innocence* [1988] and in *Landscape Suicide,* but more sparsely, to give information. Here the narration is more consistent and more important. Yes, Fred Gardner does a monotone delivery. That's because I wanted the *language* to carry the drama, rather than the *voice,* and Fred was very good at doing exactly what I asked for.

Also, to some extent, I wanted to evoke the voice of authority from the early grade-school films I saw in the Fifties, *and* to suggest the authoritative voice of the Eastern Establishment and *The New York Times*—another version of that voice from those grade-school films. But I didn't want it to *become* that; I didn't want *Deseret* to feel like an educational film. I wanted something that would suggest that, but would be *off,* at an *angle* to that voice, so that a viewer might think at first, "Gee, am I watching an educational film?" but would quickly realize that the film is much more bizarre than that.

The history the film traces is a frightening one for me. It's a history about a Manifest Destiny that's just completely gone crazy. But, of course, that idea was crazy in itself—to think that you should just take a land away from people because God wants you to have this empire.

The settling of Utah by the Mormons and the establishment of The New York Times *are the two very disparate events with which the film begins: the* Times *is the newspaper of record for the country, the Word on what's set down about the nation, and Mormons were a people trying to escape the establishment that* The New York Times *represents.*
Yes, the *Times* is very close to the Federal government ideologically, and Utah was the Wild West.

The history charted by the film becomes a kind of labyrinth: you're watching and listening to try to figure out what the actual relations were between the Mormons and the various native peoples and the Americans.

And I'm not sure I know, or that anybody knows, exactly what they were. It seems like the Mormons had two relationships with Indians: one was, well, it's cheaper to feed them than to fight them so let's be their friends; let's teach them how to farm and try to get along with them. The other was, we seem to be having a power struggle with other peoples; let's get the local Indians on our side and use them to do the devious things we don't want to do—let the blood be on *their* hands.

The Mountain Meadows massacre is a very curious part of this history. It's clear that the Mormons participated in it, and helped kill something like 125 people crossing the country from Arkansas—and then blamed it on the Indians. What isn't clear is whether Brigham Young had a role in the massacre. The *Times* concludes he knew completely. I'm not sure if that's true or not. Juanita Brooks, probably one of the best Mormon historians, concluded in her book on Mountain Meadows [*The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)] that nothing could happen in Utah without Brigham Young knowing about it, but still she wouldn't come out and say he knew about *this*.

The petroglyphs by the native peoples are a motif in the film. And then late in the film you start to show modern graffiti, sometimes superimposed over the native imagery. Were the petroglyphs, for you, an image of the world before corruption?
No. The Anasazi culture was nonviolent, but certainly there must have been corruption even in that society. When people live together, corruption happens, though I suspect corruption was at a minimum there.

To me, the petroglyphs represent a kind of spirituality that's lacking in our society today. They reveal a society that treasured art. People had to go out every day and look for food, but some people spent time drawing on the sides of cliffs, and I'm sure they ate that day because the people around them thought that their drawings were valuable. Some of those petroglyphs are a thousand years old now; they're quite moving, because they have a feel of the gesture of the artist.

There are later petroglyphs, done by more modern Indians—probably Utes—that express things besides spirituality. In one shot, there's a drawing of a cowboy as the devil, probably done in the 1850s: native political art.

You mentioned that when you were putting the various sequences of imagery together to match the sentences of the Times *stories that at least one shot in each sequence directly connects to the story we hear. Is it sometimes a metaphorical connection?*
Many times it's literal—the exact location that's being talked about. But sometimes it is metaphorical. For a story about a speech that Brigham Young gave, I could give a literal image of one of the churches where he spoke, or I could do something a little less direct: show his summer home or something even less tangible than that.

Were you recording sound at the same time you were making imagery? In your earlier films, you often constructed the illusion of sync sound.
I do like to post-sync, just so that I can control the sound more. In this case, most of the sound was recorded in Utah: I wanted to represent the *sound* of Utah too. I cheated a little; I needed something like 80 different sounds of wind, so rather than drive all the way back to Utah, I went out to the Mojave Desert to get relatively the same sounds.

North on Evers *is full of portraits. As you visit people, you often do family portrait images. You mentioned that originally the plan for* Deseret *was to have a lot of people speaking to the camera, but as it turned out, very few people made it into that film.*
Well, in *Deseret* that's because I wanted people to be represented by the newspaper stories. I thought it would be more dramatic to feature the landscapes as places that history is written upon. Actually, there are three or four shots with people, and two portrait shots. One, in black-and-white, is a polygamous farm family, shot in the style of Walker Evans. Later in the film, there's a shot of two young Mormon girls who reminded me of the Diane Arbus twins, though they're not twins. That image is used in connection with a *Times* story about how the down-winders and the children of down-winders are having problems with cancer.

You seem very photographically aware in this film. Is photography something you spend a lot of time looking at and thinking about?
Not really. I spend a lot of time looking, but I don't take many pictures and I don't look at many photographs. But I like photography.

As a film artist, you're concerned about the damage to original landscape and culture, but on the other hand, you're working in a chemically based medium.
Yes, I'm demanding a service that's polluting the Earth. Filmmaking isn't a clean industry. So one can

certainly question whatever righteous view *I* might be taking in this film. Also, I drove to Utah nine times during the shooting. We're all the enemy in this story.

Were you filming both black-and-white and color on the same trips?
I used two cameras so I could always shoot either in black-and-white or in color. I knew the film was going to start in black-and-white and end in color. Of course, that's something nobody should know before they see the film—and most people don't. I like the drama of the switch.

How long did you collect imagery for Deseret*? How long did you edit?*
First, I spent almost six months collecting the newspaper articles, and another three months editing them down into the text that's used in the film. Of course, all the narration was recorded before the imagery was edited, since the film was going to be edited to the text. The recording of the text took a couple of months; we worked two days a week generally.

I spent about 120 days shooting in Utah, over a period of 14 months. After the shooting, the editing took about nine months. I took my time because I wanted to sequence the film properly and, of course, the post-synching for over 600 shots took a long time. The film came together slowly.

You paid for it as best you could as you went?
It was made on a Rockefeller grant, so I had adequate money. A lot of the expense was travel, which I tried to do as cheaply as possible. I camped a lot. It's expensive to be on the road for 120 days.

Were you alone most of the time?
Yes, except for one trip when a friend came along.

Four Corners *came quickly after* Deseret, *and has a particularly rigorous formal structure. I remember you saying at a screening that you were even careful about the number of words you used in the rolling visual texts and in the stories the narrators tell.*
I wanted to be entirely democratic, so each section is exactly the same as the others, down to the number of letters in the text biographies of artists [1,214] and the number of words [1,186] in the voiceover stories.

The film is about the Four Corners region of the Southwest. What led to the "ringers" : the shot of the Monet painting and the history of Milwaukee you narrate?
The American history I studied in school always started in Europe, and gave little attention to Native American history, where it *should* have started. I wanted to refer to our Eurocentric view of the world. Of course, Milwaukee *was* at one time the frontier, and went through many of the same developments that the Four Corner area has—battles with Native Americans, for example—so I felt that it did relate to the topic, the West.

How did you choose the four narrators?
Hartmut Bitomski, who did the voiceover for the Monet painting, is European, and his German accent relates to both the Wetherell story and the Milwaukee story. Hartmut is a good friend and a fellow filmmaker; he was Dean of the Cal Arts Film School at the time when I made the film.

My own voice was necessary for telling my own history, which I hoped the rest of the film would put in a much larger context.

Yeasup Song's voice is used for the Native American history, because Yeasup is Korean-Asian. The Native Americans originally came from Asia across the Bering Strait.

And I used Billy Woodberry's voice for the modern story about Farmington; since Billy is black, his voice would connect the blind prejudice of the Farmington Navajos and poor whites to the blind prejudices referred to in the Milwaukee story of blacks and poor whites. Billy is a friend and fellow filmmaker [Woodberry directed *Bless Their Little Hearts,* (1984)].

In the Milwaukee sequence, one of the shots shows a bunch of kids playing basketball outdoors. A car drives into the shot, and someone shoots a gun. Did you set that up?
No, it just happened. I don't even know if it was a real drive-by, or if the guy across the street just wanted to create some drama for the film. Either way, it kept the guys in the car away from me long enough so that I could finish the shot and run off before they could steal my camera.

The Native-American artist whose life is described in one of the artist biographies is a woman. Is this you being politically correct? Is there evidence of Native-American artists being women?
This is me being in defiance of the way that historians work. In all accounts it's assumed that men did this work, but I don't see how anyone can come to this conclusion, especially since many of the same designs first appeared on pottery that those same historians claim was made only by women.

Plus I wanted some romance in the film, and Yukuwa became a romantic figure for me.

What gave you the idea of stealing Richard Dindo's soundtrack for Utopia*?*
I wanted to bring revolution to Southern California, where a kind of reverse imperialism exists. Here, cheap labor is brought in so that it can be exploited. What Che saw on his motorcycle travels at 19 was traditional imperialism: rich nations moving into poor nations to exploit cheap labor. That's what politicized him.

I got the idea for the film and just went ahead and did it, without contacting Dindo. When I met him a few years later, he seemed somewhat flattered by what I had done, and later, when permission was needed for German television, gave me permission to use his track. I don't know if he's seen the film.

Like North on Evers, Utopia *sets up a situation where the viewer is "seeing" two films simultaneously: the one you've shot and are presenting, and the one we imagine on the basis of the soundtrack we're listening to. Is your decision to use Dindo's sound a way of critiquing conventional documentary and the kinds of information it normally presents?*
No, I just wanted to liberate the notion of revolution, and bring it home.

Sometimes the images seem closely related to what we hear on the track, and sometime we're particularly aware of the differences between Bolivian geography and the particular landscapes of Southern California and Northern Mexico. I assume you wanted to create a constantly shifting relationship between the story Dindo tells and the one you tell visually.
Yes, I did. My images move you south from Death Valley down to and across the Mexican border. Occasionally, I cut images so that they relate to the sound in literal ways, but they aren't really literal because the images are from the wrong country—actually, the *right* country.

You mean you see Che's activities as equally relevant in the Southwest?
More so. The United States is where a revolution is really necessary.

How much time did you spend in Mexico?
Just enough to be scared shitless. Less than an hour. Mexicali is a very poor town. I'm not a rich filmmaker, but I look a lot richer than the Mexicalis, and I was fair game. I made it out before the police and the crooks could get to me.

I've come to see your films in two different ways. I look at each new film for itself, but I'm also seeing you as a person who's developed over several decades and whose development seems to be in very clear stages that have to do with the places you're in. I'm wondering whether, when you're making a film, you're thinking about it as part of an ongoing exploration, or whether you're just thinking about the project at hand.
When I'm asked who my influences are, I always tend to say, "Well, there are certain filmic influences from the Seventies, but basically what influences me most is the film that I made just before the film that I'm working on now." For example, before the California Trilogy, I had worked on a number of films that dealt with text/image relationship. *North on Evers* used a diary written the year before I filmed, and *Deseret* used the texts from *The New York Times*; in *Four Corners,* I wrote four little biographies and four little histories to try to place my life in a larger historical context; and for *Utopia,* I stole the text from Dindo's film. Each film used text and image in a different way from the film before. After *Utopia,* I felt like I had exhausted my interest in text/image, and when I started the California Trilogy, I knew I wanted to completely discard text and work with just image and ambient sound.

If we talk about locations, a different kind of influence is evident. When I made *North on Evers,* I drove through Utah, and was interested in what I saw there, so the next film, *Deseret,* was made *in* Utah, and then, because of what I learned and saw while making *Deseret,* I became interested in the Four Corners area, which is partly in Utah, and made *Four Corners*. *Utopia,* too, was about the West, but it was a California film. *El Valley Centro* grew directly out of *Utopia*. And when I finished *El Valley Centro,* I thought I needed an urban companion to the rural, and made *Los*. So the films just keep growing out of one another. You can trace my films from *11 x 14* all the way up through the Trilogy. In fact, the Trilogy references *11 x 14,* where I also used many shots with just image and ambient sound.

Those shots in El Valley Centro *of tractors coming toward the camera and then moving offscreen to one side, then coming back into the image from the opposite side and moving back across the field are very like shots in* 11 x 14 *and* 8½ x 11.
In *8½ x 11,* a friend who was a farmer did the shot for me; I choreographed that tractor. In *El Valley Centro* I

Courtesy James Benning

Housing development in *Los* (2000)

was looking to *find* choreographed movement. I'd see movement in the landscape, and then place the camera so that it would create visual drama. I rarely set anything up in the Trilogy.

If I read your history in terms of what you seem to be doing at different times, in 11 x 14 *and* 8½ x 11 *and also in the other, shorter, Seventies films, there's a kind of youthful, look-what-I can-do excitement about your tricks with composition. Now, you use the filmmaking process to get yourself out into the world, rather than to perform a set of tricks.*

When I look at *8½ x 11* or *11 x 14* or *One Way Boogie Woogie,* those tricks, and the little narratives I develop, seem the least interesting parts of those films. What's become more interesting to me in all three films is how they matter-of-factly documented a particular social space; *behind* all my play with off-screen space, there is actually a documentation of that time and place, which has grown more interesting as those places have changed, even disappeared.

But when I show *One Way Boogie Woogie* at retrospectives, and say, "I'm a little embarrassed by the little jokes," I'm surprised at how much interest there *is* in that youthful play. I guess it's part of those films, and maybe it makes the reading of the social spaces and that time period a little more interesting for the audience.

You and I are exactly the same age: our parents weathered the Depression, so industry was seen as this very positive thing, and we grew up in an era when we were finding out about pollution and rivers catching fire. For me the most exciting space in the world, when I was a kid, was the industrial area of New Jersey between Newark and New York City. In El Valley Centro *you reveal, again, your fascination with industry, along with a fear of what it can do.*

Well, as I said, *El Valley Centro* came out of *Utopia*. I became interested in irrigated farming and in the issue of who does the work and who makes the profit; but I was also taken with the fantastic space that's developed in those large farming areas, where the fields

Courtesy James Benning

Irrigated field in *El Valley Centro* (1999)

go on forever, and with the way machinery moves through that space. I didn't want to make a dogmatic political film about injustice, but I did want to make a film where if you looked at a space that I was enamored with, those other issues would slowly surface and you would feel my criticism of the control of that space.

In *El Valley Centro* I wanted to make images that mapped the whole valley onto the film, and to represent the different kinds of activities that happen there: the majority of it is farming, but there are also 11 prisons in the valley, there are large oil deposits in the southern part, and, every year, fertile farmland is being taken over by urbanization.

I've heard you talk about the idea of filmmaking as performance, not so much for the audience as for yourself, and about how the shots in the Trilogy are sometimes records, or emblems, of the "adventures" you went through to get the shots.

That's a part of some of my early work, also. In *Grand Opera* [1978], I documented what I thought of as two one-person performances. For the first, I went to the same spot on the Canadian River outside of Norman, Oklahoma, every day for a whole year and made one shot each day. In the film you see a series of those shots that reference my performance and measure my mental state against the constant of that place, though that "constant" changed every day, because of weather conditions or whatever.

For the second performance, I visited within a two-month period every house I'd ever lived in, and made a 360-degree pan of each place.

But it is true that when I made the Trilogy, it was really105 performances: me going to 105 places and recording how I felt at those places at those moments. The Trilogy is an accumulation of performance.

The performances you do in Grand Opera *declare themselves as performances, whereas in the California films, the performance necessary to make the shot is rarely evident: the drive you took from Reno to L.A. to get your camera and back to Reno to get the shot of the forest fire doesn't declare itself within the shot.*

But that's true with a lot of filmmakers. When *they* watch their films, it's always a completely different experience, because every shot has a story that for the audience is not part of the film. It's kind of nice to be an audience and *not* know all those stories, so you can watch the film purely.

However, I do think that unconsciously all the work that goes into making an image somehow ends up in that image. That might be a bold statement, and I *don't* think an audience could tell you the exact facts—it's a subtle feeling. For instance, when you see the sand blowing in Death Valley with such intensity, you don't know the story of how difficult it was to make that shot and how I was almost delirious from the 130-degree heat and the 45-mile-an-hour winds that were dehydrating me, but I think the shot itself has such intensity that you almost feel that that could be the story. I'm hoping that's true.

Hemingway said that when a writer knows what he's talking about, he can leave things out and retain their impact; the reader will sense in what's left all that the writer knows.
Yes, that's exactly what I'm talking about.

Sogobi *is full of gorgeous images. But I wonder if you had mixed feelings about what you're looking at in the first two parts of the Trilogy. One of the challenges you must have felt is how to make an image of some relatively humdrum event in L.A. work as part of the film. If you're going to make a complete portrait of a city, there are going to be spectacular things and dull things. I guess what I'm asking is whether you felt that making the first two films gave you the "right" to make* Sogobi. *You've made clear that you mean to show all three films together, which tells me that you see* Sogobi *as a kind of response to* El Valley Centro *and* Los.
I think I've always tried to make images that are beautiful, though maybe not always in the classical sense of "beautiful." I think every shot in *El Valley Centro* and *Los* is beautiful—but in a different way than is true in *Sogobi*. In *Los,* the freeway shot is unbelievably beautiful, and the shot of the cows is beautiful, and Dodger stadium is beautiful, and even the shot of Sixth Street, where the homeless walk by, is beautiful in a subtle way—in the light and shadow. But in *Sogobi,* I did want to have the classic beauty of wilderness, so that when you have the interruptions by human process, they happen within that classical sense of beauty.

But in *Los* I certainly didn't purposely make any ugly images. The shot of the Korean strip mall may seem very mundane, but I find it quite stunning—the blue sky and the palm trees sticking out from behind and the flags that are hanging into the top of the frame, and the arrow on the parking structure. As part of my visual mapping of Los Angeles, I wanted to show activities that weren't spectacular, but I did want each image to be constructed in such a way that it had some interest to it, and a clear sense of design.

The same is true of *El Valley Centro*. I think a lot of the farming shots are just gorgeous. The shot of the crop duster is amazingly beautiful. . . .

That's a shot where we're very conscious of you as a kind of filmmaker/adventurer. When the plane goes over the top of you, we wonder what you're wearing, whether you're protected.
Actually, I didn't have to protect myself. I tried to film crop-dusters and it was impossible; I was in their way and they wouldn't spray me. I wouldn't have been sprayed anyway; I would have run away before the dust hit the ground. But as soon as I'd set the camera up, they'd fly over and shake their fists at me and yell, "Get out of there!" So I went to a crop-dusting place and hired the plane and they sprayed water over me instead of insecticide. That's one of the few places in the Trilogy where I actually choreographed the movement. I did copy the exact movement that the crop-dusters use.

How much do you consciously allude? The shot in Sogobi *of Yosemite Valley is the classic photographic view that Muybridge and Carleton Watkins and Ansel Adams have recorded. The shot of the ship going under the Golden Gate Bridge is almost identical to shots in Peter Hutton's* Study of a River *[1997]. And, of course, whenever I see a crop-duster, I think of* North by Northwest *[1959].*
That is the classic Yosemite image, but in *Sogobi* the waterfall actually changes shape. At first the shot looks like a still photograph, but once you start searching the image, you see that the waterfall is moving, and then a few bugs fly through the frame—there's a different sense than a photograph can give. I like that particular shot because it references those classic photographs, but I think it has its own presence because it's time-based. And you also have the soundtrack.

You can't make a crop-duster shot without thinking of Hitchcock. But I wasn't making the shot as an

allusion, but because most of the valley is sprayed with chemicals. You see crop-dusters there year round. There are lots of little crop-dusting businesses. And sometimes the crop dusting is quite spectacular; they might spray a bright yellow chemical powder. I *was* very aware that as soon as you'd see the image, you'd think of *North by Northwest*. That doesn't bother me.

Peter Hutton, of course, is a great friend, and I admire his work. But I think it's coincidental that we happened to make the same shot. There's a ship in *El Valley Centro* and one in *Los*; the shot in *Sogobi* is there to echo the earlier two. I shot from the Golden Gate Bridge because I wanted to portray the water as wilderness. It turns out to be very reminiscent of shots in *Study of a River,* which I saw after I made my shot. It was coincidental, but I'm delighted to be in Peter's company.

At this point, after a hundred years of filmmaking, a lot of images have been made, and my films are more involved with referencing the beginning of filmmaking, when people put a full roll in the camera and locked it down and let the camera run continuously, recording a train coming into the station for however long their roll of film was.

My rolls are bigger than the ones the Lumières used, but the idea is the same. A standard 100-foot roll of 16mm film is two minutes 47 seconds, so I cut each shot to two-and-a-half minutes so I could have enough leeway, once I cut the heads and tails off, to be able to adjust the timing of the shot. I also wanted to use two-and-a-half minutes—rather than, say, two minutes and 40 seconds—because two-and-a-half times 35 shots equals 87-and-a-half minutes, plus two-and-a-half minutes of credits makes exactly 90 minutes. 90 minutes is a manageable duration, money-wise and audience-wise, for the kinds of films I do. Of course, the Trilogy is now five hours if you include a couple of 15-minute breaks. But I think that's manageable too.

Courtesy James Benning

Redwoods in *Sogobi* (2001)

I find the Trilogy, and especially Sogobi, *very dramatic. In* The Bear, *Faulkner sets up a 100-mile-square space that's what's left of the northern Mississippi wilderness; and the edges of even this space are being chewed away by farmers and lumber companies. The structure of your three films works the same way: we see the totally developed areas of California in the first two films, then we go to what's not developed—but every once in a while, there will be a "chew" into the "square" of what's left, and it hurts. The Trilogy is also a little like* Deseret*: by the end, we're frightened for this beautiful place.*

The whole Trilogy is basically about the politics of water. In the Central Valley, corporate farms take advantage of two irrigation systems that were built with public money: one with federal money, one with state money. The corporations paid for none of the construction, but they take full advantage of it: 85 percent of the water in California is used for farming; only 15 percent is used for manufacturing and public consumption. And of course, Los Angeles was expanded by stealing water from the Owens Valley.

When I made *El Valley Centro,* I was very aware of the water politics, and I thought, "Well, when I make this urban companion, I'll have to make a reference to how those politics continue from one place to another." So *Los* begins with water flowing into L.A. in the original aqueduct from the Owens Valley. And then, in *Sogobi,* I tried to show where the water comes from.

And that last image of the pipe in the reservoir is almost a punchline; it takes you back to the first image in the Trilogy.

Yes, the very last image explains the mystery of the first. Also, the last image of *El Valley Centro* relates to the first image of *Los,* and the last image of *Los* relates to the first image of *Sogobi*. The Trilogy could play continuously, and you could enter anywhere.

Originally, I was going to edit *Sogobi* the way I edited *El Valley Centro* and *Los*. In both those cases I shot 48 rolls of film, but only developed 38 of them, so I had 38 shots that I edited using slides. With *Sogobi* I shot a lot more—120 or 130 rolls of film—and I assumed the editing was going to be a lot more difficult. I put individual frames from all the shots on slides and was going to choose 35. I was teaching in Korea last year and planned to edit the film in Korea with a slide projector. But I forgot to take the slides with me, and didn't realize it until I was on the plane. So I took the in-flight magazine and tore 35 little squares out of it, corners of pages that were blank, and wrote down the first 35 shots I could remember. I "edited" on the plane by shuffling those pieces of paper. When I got back from Korea, I did decide to change a few things. But almost all the shots I remembered got into the film. So that accident made the process much easier: I didn't have to deal with 130 shots.

Do you look back and think some of your films are better than others?

Well, I don't want to talk about films I don't like, but I'm glad to tell you which ones I do like. Of course, when you have a career, you can't be completely consistent. You need to have some failures; if you never fail, you're not pushing your limits. And when you do push your limits, you can go in the wrong direction and make things that will embarrass you later.

I like the majority of the films I've made. I tend to dismiss my early short films, although I still like them. I think the first film that I made that's *important* is *11 x 14*. And *One Way Boogie Woogie* is almost as important as *11 x 14*. The next film that's important for me is *American Dreams,* one of my favorites. And I love to show *Landscape Suicide,* though I think it has flaws—I'm much more subtle now.

I don't think I'd change anything in *American Dreams,* though. And all the films from *North on Evers* on, I really like.

Is California Trilogy your first sync-sound project?

I've used some sync in almost every film—like the El shot in *11 x 14*. In *Landscape Suicide* the monologues are shot in sync. But I shot the most sync I've ever shot for the Trilogy.

Are you always looking for imagery when you move around? For years, Jonas Mekas seemed to have his camera with him all the time.

I've never been like that. I am always looking, though. I went for a walk this morning through the beautiful desert landscape here in Arizona and I was constantly thinking of how it would look on film, how light was falling on the back of cacti in a spectacular way. If I come back down here, I might make a shot using what I saw today.

So you think in terms of shots, like a photographer.

Yeah. But I always think of an image as it changes over time. When we were out earlier this evening, a breeze came up and, of course, you can't show a breeze in a still photograph. The cacti were moving in a particular way because of the breeze, and that could be caught on film.

There are shots in *Sogobi* where nothing happens, and you can't show nothing happening in a photo-

graph: you need to see an image over time to know that absolutely nothing is visibly happening. Remember that shot of the beautiful tree in the fog? Maybe the tree moves a little, but I'm not sure; I've watched it so many times and I've tried to see some movement and I can't find any. But I wouldn't know that if the image were a photograph.

Things in *Sogobi,* in the whole Trilogy, need to be studied. This is true for individual shots, and because there are so many cross-references between the three films. Even the first time through, you might notice that there are cows in all three films, and billboards—you might not remember that they're all from the same company, Outdoor Systems—and aircraft, and trains (a freight train, a commuter train, then a freight train again), and ocean-going ships. There's wilderness in all three.

The structure is the most obvious cross-reference: the same number of images, of the same length, the same kind of credits, and so on.
Even the film stock for all three was bought by the Austin Film Society.

How is it that the Austin Film Society funded a film on California?
I've been showing in Austin for many years, so they're interested in my work, and when I was making *El Valley Centro,* I needed money to buy film stock. They said, "We'll get you some money," and then when I made *Los,* I happened to be in Austin showing *El Valley Centro,* and they said, "Well, let us give you some more money for film stock." That happened all three times.

You mentioned the other day that these films have actually made money, which is almost illegal in the avant-garde! Since when do they make money, and is the California Trilogy the most successful of your films financially?
Well, if they more than pay for themselves, I consider them successful because most films don't pay for themselves. *11 x 14* paid for itself. I made *One Way Boogie Woogie* on a Wisconsin Arts Council grant that paid for the film, and made a little profit from the rentals. *American Dreams* had many, many rentals, and it was made so cheaply that it probably paid for itself too. A number of the films were made with Guggenheim and Rockefeller grants, and I was always careful to make them for less than the grants, so they paid for themselves. *Him and Me* [1982] was made with German television money, so I made money on that film too.

Recently I sold five films all at once to European television: *Utopia, Four Corners,* and the Trilogy.

May I ask how much you got?
Altogether it was a little over $100,000, which is pretty good. By the time I make my films, I have them paid for, so if money comes in from European television, all of a sudden I have a windfall that allows me to make more films and do other things.

Does your teaching affect your filmmaking?
Well, it affects the work by taking up my time [laughing]. But I love teaching, because I get such good students. I make them think on their feet, so they make me think on my feet too. I think it's real positive. My biggest concern now comes out of the teaching, ironically because at California Institute of the Arts we've had an incredible run of successful recruiting. We've done such a good job at helping them that while they do refine and push the limits of the models we've provided them, I'm afraid we've also *contained* filmmaking in a way that may make for good films, but not for something that's going to change the way that films are made.

When I was younger, I experienced the excitement of seeing entirely new kinds of films arriving on the scene, and I want to experience that again before film is dead. I think to make film *explode,* one has to deny everything that's been done and find something else. I'm not talking about technology at all; I'm looking for an answer within the mind. *Wavelength* [Michael Snow, 1967] was completely upsetting, and at the same time thrilling, and it questioned narrative and the way light hits the screen. That film was an explosion—and I want some more explosions.

Scott MacDonald has just published the fourth volume of his series, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers,* with the University of California Press. His *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (also with UC Press) appeared in 2002. He teaches at Bard College.

Abstract Since the late 1980s, veteran independent filmmaker James Benning has been exploring the American West in a series of visually stunning and conceptually sophisticated feature films, largely ignored by American programmers and the American critical establishment. In "Exploring the New West," Benning and Scott MacDonald discuss these films, revealing their often intricate design and the wide variety of ways in which they engage such issues as the environment and racial politics.

Aviva Briefel

Monster Pains

Masochism, Menstruation, and Identification in the Horror Film

Pre-teen trauma in *Audrey Rose*

It hurts to be a monster. The make-up and costumes alone could make you scream. Encased in padding, plaster, and greasepaint, Boris Karloff endured impossible tortures to become Frankenstein's creature. As he described, "I felt, most of the time, as if I were wearing a clammy shroud. No doubt it added to the realism!"[1] Bela Lugosi traced his debilitating drug addiction to the physical pain he experienced while making horror films such as *Dracula*.[2] Lon Chaney, the man of a thousand monstrous faces, seemed to take a sort of pleasure in his suffering, anticipating it before the shooting of his films and prolonging it during their production. Referring to the wire apparatus installed in Chaney's nostrils to give him the Phantom of the Opera's cavernous nose, a process that would often lead him to "bleed like hell," the film's cinematographer confirmed, "He suffered, you know."[3] Joan Crawford, Chaney's costar in *The Unknown,* a 1927 flick about a man who amputates his arms for a woman who has a phobia about being held, described his surprising devotion to this role: "Mr. Chaney could have unstrapped his arms between scenes. He did not. He kept them strapped one day for five hours, enduring such numbness, such torture, that when we got to this scene, he was able to convey not just realism but such emotional agony that it was shocking . . . and fascinating."[4]

But despite its indulgence in various slashings and slicings, the horror film may seem quite oblivious to pain. Moralistic critiques of the genre often accuse it of desensitizing its audiences to the realities of suffering and suggest that its fascinated explorations of the various things that can happen to a human body favor spectacle over "real" feeling. In what follows, I will suggest that pain is central to how we relate to the horror film—but not as a vehicle through which we can sympathize with the monster's victims. Instead, I will propose that it is the monster's pain that determines audience positioning in the horror film. The genre presents two contrasting modes of monstrous suffering: masochism and menstruation. These two options dictate spectatorial identification in gendered terms. Masochism is central to the construction of male monsters, who initiate their sadistic rampages with acts of self-mutilation. These "masochistic moments"[5] close off the film to viewer identification and draw our attention to the *process* of identification itself. Neither complicit in nor victimized by the on-screen violence, we remain at a safe critical distance from the cinematic events. The female counterpart to the act of self-mutilation is menstruation, a narrative event that positions the audience in an uncomfortably close relationship to the female monster. These differences between the masochistic and menstrual plots of horror cinema expose an underlying conservatism in a potentially radical genre.

The Masochistic Monster

Before they set off to harm others, male monsters revel in masochistic acts. In Rouben Mamoulian's

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Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1931) and in subsequent film versions of the story, Jekyll's drinking of the transformative potion is an act of both intense pain and pleasure, as the doctor writhes around his laboratory before turning into the toothy, smiling Hyde. Seth Brundle's slow degeneration into a monstrous insect in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) is marked by his fascination with the various putrefactions and amputations that his body undergoes along the way. Clive Barker's 1980s *Hellraiser* series (originally titled *Sadomasochists from beyond the Grave*)[6] is populated by humans who turn into monsters by seeking the most intense experiences of pleasure and pain: once they solve the cursed puzzle box, their flesh is ripped apart by pins and hooks and they realize that "Some things have to be endured, and that's what makes the pleasure so sweet." In the original *Nightmare on Elm Street* (dir. Wes Craven, 1984) and its many sequels, Freddy Krueger prefaces his killings of teenagers by gleefully engaging in acts of self-mutilation, saying, "Watch this!" and cutting off his "real" fingers with his razor claws or slicing his own head open. *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (dir. Rachel Talalay, 1991), the sixth and definitely not the final installment of the series, features a scene of the adolescent Freddy cutting his torso with a razorblade and laughing. His stepfather, played by Alice Cooper, appears with a belt and asks, "Are you ready for it, boy?" Freddy welcomes his beating with gusto, begging, "Thank you, sir. Can I have another?"

Although it acknowledges the centrality of masochism to the genre, recent horror film criticism overlooks the monster's self-mutilations. Critics tend to focus instead on the spectator's masochistic pleasure in watching films full of suffering and carnage, often geared toward characters who are meant to represent the audience in some way.[7] In her famous study of the slasher genre, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws,* Carol Clover defines masochism as the "dominant" aesthetic in "horror cinema and . . . one of that genre's defining characteristics; . . . the experience horror moviegoers seek . . . is rooted in a pain/pleasure sensibility."[8] Clover focuses much of her argument about the masochistic elements of the horror film on the "Final Girl," the androgynous female character who suffers the monster's tortures throughout the film, but who ultimately defeats him and survives. The Final Girl's subjection to and eventual victory over the monster provide a site of identification for the male spectator. Revising Laura Mulvey's view that the male spectator's gaze is sadistic, Clover argues that his identification with the Final Girl demonstrates a masochistic impulse: "The willingness and even eagerness (so we judge from these films' enormous popularity) of the male viewer to throw in his emotional lot, if only temporarily, with not only a woman but a woman in fear and pain, at least in the first instance, would seem to suggest that he has a vicarious stake in that fear and pain."[9] In his essay "Masculinity and the Horror Film," Peter Hutchings takes Clover's argument further by suggesting that the monster can become a site of masochistic identification. He contends that the male monster frequently suffers in the horror film; the force of evil becomes vulnerable in the course of the narrative, as evidenced by Dracula's and King Kong's persecutions or by Michael Meyers' pathetic loss of his mask at the end of *Halloween* (dir. John Carpenter, 1978). According to Hutchings, the monster's suffering offers a masochistic position with which the male spectator can identify. This spectatorial position is pleasurable, in that it allows the spectator to experience a

Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster

"willing subjection" that makes his return to authority all the more powerful.[10]

The monster's masochism does not allow for sympathetic identifications. It is a profoundly disturbing occurrence, the shock value of which emanates both from the unexpectedness of the monster hurting himself when his apparent role in the film is to harm others, and from its challenge to conventional notions of monstrosity. Is the monster a show-off, bragging to his prospective victims (and, by extension, to his audience) that he can withstand what they cannot? Is he using his own body to preview what he will ultimately do to them, thereby disrupting the boundary between victims and monsters? And, perhaps most importantly, is he capable of feeling pain? In the flashback to Freddy Krueger's adolescence in *Freddy's Dead,* the young monster tells his abusive stepfather, from whom he has just demanded more punishment, "You wanna know the secret of pain? If you can stop feeling it, you can start using it." Freddy's statement about the origins of monstrosity reverses Freud's claim in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) that masochism is "nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self."[11] Instead, the monster's statement follows Freud's later work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in acknowledging the presence of a "primary masochism" that can precede sadistic behavior; once he has delivered his declamation on pain, Freddy directs his razorblade toward his father.[12] His transition from inflicting violence on himself to turning the violence outwards suggests that monstrosity originates when the ability to resist pain turns into a desire to harm others.

This trajectory dictates the spectator's own process of identification in watching the masochistic monster. Freddy's suggestion that the monster does not *feel* pain when he wounds himself inhibits audience identification in this cinematic moment. The monster creates a self-referential space around himself that cannot be penetrated by any of our sympathetic identifications, which might emerge when he is attacked by angry villagers or Final Girls. As such, the masochistic moment epitomizes Elaine Scarry's discussion of pain more generally as representing an "absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons."[13] The dramatic separation between the monster and his audience places us in a spectatorial limbo in which we are unable to situate ourselves on screen. When the monster attacks his victim after his masochistic act, however, we can begin to claim our proper place in the film—with the

Bela Lugosi in Tod Browning's 1931 *Dracula*

monster's victims. Just as the monster's violence is first directed toward himself and then projected into his surroundings, our identification must initially be self-reflexive (it cannot go anywhere during the masochistic moment) before it can extend into the cinematic world.

Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) follows this sequence in tracing the misfortunes of a group of five teenagers on a road trip who fall prey to a chainsaw-wielding, cannibalistic family. All the teenagers are massacred except for Sally, the Final Girl, who escapes at the end. In one of the film's early scenes, the kids pick up an ominous looking hitchhiker, who grabs the knife of the disabled teen, Franklin, and proceeds to slice his own hand while laughing maniacally. This act suspends our identification with both the hitchhiker (the monster) and the teenagers. The hitchhiker's apparent disregard of the pain that would ordinarily result from self-mutilation bars us from identifying with him; he is involved in a purely self-reflexive, and thereby exclusionary, action. Recalling Freddy's statement, we are uncertain about the nature or extent of his suffering. On the other hand, we cannot fully place ourselves in the teenagers' positions. Their horrified screams and questions—"What are you doing to yourself?"—invite the

audience to notice the incomprehensible horror of the situation, but not in the same way as the teenagers. Their stupefaction renders them somewhat stupid. As connoisseurs of the genre, we know that their question should not be, "What are you doing to yourself?" but, "What are you going to do to us?"

Once the scene shifts from masochism to sadism, however, we discover our proper place on screen. Having stabbed himself, the hitchhiker moves on to the sadistic act of stabbing Franklin, and the events leading up to the attack drift away from the self-referentiality of the monster's masochism. This transition is initiated by the hitchhiker's offer of his own knife to one of the teenage boys, as if inviting him to emulate his masochistic gesture. The hitchhiker then decides to take a picture of his teenage audience. This seemingly random act, which has its double in the randomness of the masochistic moment, restores the characters to their proper roles and allows us to begin our process of identification. Franklin's reaction to being the subject of the shot—"You took my picture!"—reminds us that it is we who are the real subjects of the horror film. The genre is notorious for confronting its target audience—in this case, young Americans—with cinematic images of themselves in various states of danger. The parallel between the kids in the van and the spectators reaches its peak when the hitchhiker points out the economic relationship in which they are now involved: "It's a nice picture; you can pay me now, it's two dollars." The possibility of a financial transaction linked to seeing pictures mirrors the spectators' seeming masochism in paying money to be terrorized. The masochistic monster takes on the role of director in this scene, reminding spectators that they rely on him to have their picture taken, to find their proper space on screen. When he burns the photograph shortly afterwards, he confirms what we expect from the slasher film—a visual display of our own decimation.[14]

The impenetrability of the masochistic moment, coupled with the enigma of the monster's pain, creates an uncertainty that extends throughout the narrative. The film never allows us to forget that our subject position originates in the monster's self-reflexive violence. Franklin provides a model of the impact that this initial encounter with the monster will have on the audience. He is traumatized after his experience with the hitchhiker, and, until he is cut to pieces himself, tries to piece together what he has just witnessed. Fascinated with the knife, he scrutinizes it for traces of the hitchhiker's blood and wields it dangerously close to his own hand, while pondering, "Yeah, it takes

Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's *The Fly*

something, though, just to do that to yourself like he did." The monster's act also haunts the viewer and becomes the basis of our horror spectatorship. We gravitate toward the hitchhiker, but the strangeness of his act and the unknowability of his pain prevent us from fully identifying with him. While we do end up aligning ourselves with the teenagers, this identification is limited by what we witnessed early on in the film. We may feel endangered by the images of violence on screen, but we are ultimately numb to the pain they represent.

Our spectatorial distance is also assured even when we encounter monsters who seem to ask us to feel for them. The monster's masochism suspends our identification even when he visibly suffers. Cronenberg's *The Fly,* a film that tests the line between horror and melodrama,[15] keeps us at a safe distance from Seth Brundle's grueling transformation into an insect. Like his masochistic predecessors, Seth's entrance into monstrosity results from a self-inflicted act: in this case, walking into the incompletely tested teleporter pod he is in the process of designing. Although he does not choose the disaster that follows his recklessness—he fuses with a fly lurking in the machine—the film suggests that he is the willing victim of his own experiment. Cronenberg repeatedly reminds us

of the masochistic nature of this act in the various scenes of Seth (a.k.a. Brundlefly) precipitating his physical demise by removing parts of his body, which he stores in a bathroom cabinet he has named the "Brundle Museum of Natural History." His extraction of his own teeth and nails recalls the troubling detachment with which the hitchhiker and Freddy perform their self-mutilations. At the same time, however, there are moments in the film in which Seth is clearly affected by his degradation, and, in the words of his girlfriend, Ronnie, is "scared, and angry, and desperate." When his ear falls off toward the beginning of his transformation, he pleads, "I'm scared. Help me. Please, please help me." Although we are not completely immune to his pathetic changes, we are forced to maintain a safe distance from Brundlefly. Cronenberg never lets us forget that we are watching a film. He depicts Seth's journey through the teleporter as a passage from reality to representation; as the scientist tells his girlfriend, the machine provides an "interpretation" of whatever goes through it.[16] The Seth who comes out at the other end is a film version of the "real" Seth. His cinematic identity begins as an aggrandized, narcissistic projection of himself (like many larger-than-life film stars, he develops superhuman strength, a fabulous sex drive, and an unrelenting ego) and ends up as a B-movie monster (his explanation that he has been "spliced" with a fly evokes the film editing that makes such monsters possible).[17] Seth's status as a representation is further confirmed by the introduction of a real camera into the narrative: the one through which he and Ronnie map his mutation into Brundlefly. The double mediation of the teleporter and camera distances us from the scientist and his suffering. His pain is like the steak that he sends through the machine early on in the film; it starts off as the real thing, and ends up "synthetic." The teleporter and the camera both allow flesh to "get lost in the translation." The reflexivity of Seth's originary masochism heralds an equally self-referential mode of narrative that foregrounds cinematic technology over transparent affect.

Cronenberg's film develops another effective strategy for distancing us from its celluloid monster: it provides a nightmarish vision of what the alternative might be. The biggest threat posed by Seth is a suffocating intimacy. As Adam Knee writes, the film presents a claustrophobic view of romantic relationships and suggests that "getting involved means having oneself inextricably fused with another."[18] By the end of the narrative, when Seth's masochism has mutated into sadism, he tries to coerce the now-pregnant Ronnie to fuse with him in the teleporter. This fusion would be dangerous to the spectators as well, since Ronnie is our point of identification in the narrative; it is through her that we know when to feel disgust, fear, or pity.[19] Were she to be spliced with Brundlefly, our mediated vision would be endangered, and we too might end up as part of the fly/man/woman/baby mess resulting from the teleportation. Cronenberg saves us from this debilitating overidentification by conflating Seth with the cinematic apparatus at the end of the film: his attempts to meld with his girlfriend fail, and he splices with the teleporter instead, thus losing all claims to flesh.

The film presents us with a nightmare of ultimate fusion only to release us from its actualization. Ronnie gives us a sense of what such a union would entail. Even after she has exterminated her insectile lover in an act that lies somewhere between a mercy killing and self-defense, she must deal with the consequences of her pregnancy. Seth had curtailed her attempts to have an abortion by crashing into the operating room and abducting her. Although she had pleaded earlier on that she wanted the fetus "out of my body now . . . I'll do it myself if I have to," the narrative ends with her entrapment within the biological imperative of pregnancy. Were the film to trace her own monstrous transformation into the mother of a baby fly—it gives us a vision of this earlier on, in showing her nightmare of giving birth to a horrific larva—we might not be able to separate ourselves as easily from her as we did from Seth.[20] As I will discuss in the next section, the female monster demands the very claustrophobic closeness from which Cronenberg mercifully spares us.

Cramp: Why Female Monsters Make Us Cry

As *The Fly* begins to suggest, the horror spectator's numbness depends on a gendered system of identification; the masochistic monster is always male. Female monsters do not inflict pain on themselves before undertaking their sadistic rampages. On the contrary, they tend to commit acts of violence out of revenge for earlier abuse by parents, partners, rapists, and other offenders. Brian de Palma's *Carrie* (1976) presents a textbook example of this model, as Carrie White's fiery destruction of her teachers and peers is preceded by countless scenes of her victimization: she is physically and emotionally abused by her mother; pelted with tampons by teenage girls in the locker

room; and humiliated by having pig's blood dumped on her by her classmates during her brief stint as prom queen. In Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979), Nora responds to her childhood of abuse by spawning an army of dwarf-sized minions who murder the objects of her anger (her mother, her father, her daughter's kindergarten teacher). Jason Voorhees's mother from *Friday the Thirteenth* (dir. Sean Cunningham, 1980) follows in the footsteps of the female monster by slaughtering the teenage camp counselors who killed her son through their negligence; they were too busy making out to hear his drowning cries.

When the female monster engages in masochistic acts, she does so either by coercion from an outside force or as a way of terminating her monstrosity. The horror film is rife with examples of women who compulsively harm themselves once they have been possessed. In *The Exorcist* (dir. William Friedkin, 1973), Regan is compelled by the demon within her to stab herself with a crucifix in the face and crotch. Friedkin explains that when choosing her makeup for the film, he "thought that her disfiguration should come from something she did to herself."[21] Her self-inflicted pain recalls the male monster's masochism but lacks its intentionality. The passivity of such self-mutilations is expressed by the character Frankie in the 1999 film *Stigmata* (dir. Rupert Wainwright). Possessed by a combination of holy and unholy forces, she is made to bleed Christ's wounds. When a doctor implies that Frankie has inflicted these gashes on herself, she retorts, "You keep saying 'she,' but I didn't do this!" Her resistance to becoming a monstrous being (her voice and appearance change in a manner recalling Regan) suggests the passivity inherent in these unwanted wounds. Pinhead, from the second *Hellraiser* film (dir. Tony Randel, 1988), asserts the importance of intentionality to male masochism when he denies torture to a young, mute girl who has solved the puzzle box. Rather than subjecting her to the "sweet suffering" he reserves for men who willingly enter his domain, he declares, "It is not hands that call us, it is desire," and leaves her alone. When women do assert a more active control over their self-inflicted pain, it is often out of a self-destructive impulse that eliminates rather than generates monstrosity. Carrie uses her telekinetic powers to kill herself and her mother; Ripley jumps into a fiery pit once she has been inseminated by the alien in *Alien 3* (dir. David Fincher, 1992); and Sarah in *The Hunger* (dir. Tony Scott, 1983) stabs herself in the jugular to avoid becoming a vampire like her lover Miriam.[22] These female characters demonstrate a form of masochism that is intended to eliminate—rather than unleash—their monstrosity.

Piper Laurie gets what's coming to her in *Carrie*.

While male monsters wound themselves before turning to violence, female monsters menstruate. Violence in the horror film is often initiated by the female monster getting her period, an event that is either suggested or overtly displayed. *Carrie* and John Fawcett's teenage-girl werewolf film, *Ginger Snaps* (2000), both graphically show their female leads' menstruation as a precursor—or even a prerequisite—to their committing acts of violence. Other films, such as *The Exorcist* and *Audrey Rose* (dir. Robert Wise, 1977), imply that menstruation heralds monstrosity, as both of their victims become possessed (once they reach puberty. Menstruation, or its absence, is also central to films dealing with women's monstrous reproductions, such as *The Fly,* with its ominous treatment of Ronnie's pregnancy, and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Rosemary and her husband carefully map out her menstrual cycle in planning her pregnancy. Beyond this, menstruation can exist as a metaphorical condition in the horror film, particularly in the case of female vampires; as Barbara Creed writes, the vampire is a "menstrual monster."[23] Countess Zaleska in Lambert Hillyer's *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) and Miriam in *The Hunger* are both inflicted with a "curse" that compels them to drink the blood of their victims.[24]

In fact, the horror film positions menstruation as the structural double of the masochistic moment offered by male monsters. At the beginning of *Carrie,* we witness the nerdy adolescent girl getting her period for the first time. De Palma presents this event as a rewriting of the famous shower scene from *Psycho* (1960). For Carrie, a student at Bates High School, as

Susan Swift and Marsha Mason in *Audrey Rose*

for Hitchcock's Marion Crane, a temporary lodger at the Bates Motel, the shower is at first a refuge from external anxieties, a comforting site of self-pleasuring. The shots in both scenes are fragmentary, fetishizing the body's pleasure and then its pain.[25] Our languorous attention to Carrie's physicality is disrupted by the sudden appearance of a stream of blood from the very spot between her legs that she had just been stroking. With its intertexutal reference to *Psycho,* the scene suggests that her blood is the outpouring of a wound instead of a sign of healthy puberty.[26] But De Palma's film implies that Carrie, unlike Marion, has inflicted this wound on herself through her illicit touching. The close-ups on Carrie's hands and legs as she engages in and eventually bleeds from her "self-abuse" mirror the camera's attention to the hitchhiker's self-mutilations in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The experience in the shower leads to Carrie's later sadistic acts, as she acquires her destructive telekinetic powers right after getting her period: her anger makes a bathroom light explode. Eventually covered in pig's blood rather than menstrual blood, she will use these powers to burn down her prom.

And yet, the similarities between Carrie's menstruation and the masochistic moment end up reinforcing their essential differences. While both herald the advent of monstrosity, menstruation appears as a passive, uncontrollable act that reflects an equally passive identity. The film misleads us with its suggestion that Carrie has caused her own period through her masturbation. As soon as we meet her mother, we realize that this is how *she* would read the scene, as she brutally punishes her daughter in one of the most heartbreaking moments of the narrative. As viewers, we want to distance ourselves from the mother's Christian, prohibitive attitude, and thus we remember that periods are not caused by masturbation, that they will happen regardless of how steamy Carrie's showers are. Carrie has as little control over what her body does in the shower as she will later have over her victims; she seems always on the point of asking, "Did *I* do that?" The film taunts Carrie with the impossibility of her masochism through its repeated attention to a statue of Saint Sebastian, which Mrs. White keeps in the closet where she locks her daughter for punishment. Saint Sebastian, the unofficial patron saint of masochism, stares reproachfully at the young girl as a model of what she can never be. Carrie reacts to her suffering as one might, by crying and screaming, rather than by enjoying or controlling her pain.[27] Because Carrie is unable to stop feeling pain, she cannot use it as effectively as her male counterparts, whose violence often displays an obsessive control.

Carrie's inability to manage her pain and to control her violence affects how we place ourselves in the film. At first, it seems that the shower scene parallels the structure of identification produced by the masochistic moment. When Carrie gets her period, we can neither identify with her cruel classmates, who yell, "Plug it up!" while pelting her with tampons, nor can we identify with Carrie, whose shock at her own blood reveals a disquieting and even reprehensible innocence. As her gym teacher and mentor, Miss Collins, tells the high-school principal, "The thing is, I know how they felt. . . . The whole thing made me want to take her and shake her, too. . . . It was just her period, for God's sake." By the end of the shower scene, however, we are firmly situated in the body of the suffering teenager. The female monster denies us the space and numbness afforded by the male monster's masochism. Carol Clover begins *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* with a quote from Stephen King regarding his character's appeal: "And one reason for the success of the story in both print and film, I think, lies in this: Carrie's revenge is something that any student who has ever had his gym shorts pulled down in Phys Ed or his glasses thumb-rubbed in study hall could approve of."[28] Much of the film's appeal is based on the suffocating intimacy that we are made to share with Carrie. This intimacy is represented by her telekinesis, an unwanted power that projects her into

Carrie wreaks havoc at the prom.

the surrounding world. In contrast to the teleportation device of *The Fly,* which creates a separation between the viewer and Seth Brundle, Carrie's telekinetic powers project outwards and eliminate the space between herself and those around her. It is a supernatural manifestation of the aggressive demands of sympathy.

Even at the very end of *Carrie,* when the young girl's telekinetic powers have destroyed her high school, her mother, and herself, she returns to us and demands our attention. The very last scene of the film portrays Sue's (the only one of Carrie's female peers who tried to help her) post-prom nightmare. She dreams that she is slowly drifting through a landscape bearing markers of Carrie's absence: the barren earth where her house once stood and a "For Sale" sign that resembles a graveyard cross, covered with the sinister graffiti, "Carrie White burns in hell." Sentimental music pervades the scene. When Sue bends down to put flowers on what seems to be Carrie's fresh grave, a hand shoots out and grabs her wrist. This scene marks the violent return of Sue's repressed sympathy for the monstrous Carrie. Carrie's hand is at once threatening and pathetic, as it reaches out to remind us of its suffering. The film rewrites the typical return of the monster in the horror film, a genre that notoriously resists closure, as a moment of sentimental violence.

Similarly, Regan in *The Exorcist* tries to garner sympathy when she is deep within Satan's control; who can forget the scene in which the pathetic words "Help Me" appear on the surface of her repulsive body? This demand for sympathy does not work against her monstrosity, but forms its very core. The possessed young girl poses the threat of a stifling intimacy that rivals the danger of complete fusion at the end of *The Fly*. When Father Karras prepares to exorcise her, her demonic voice expresses delight at the prospect of an act that "would bring us together." Fulfilling this promise, she temporarily assumes the identity of Karras's deceased mother, and addresses the son in a suffering voice; he responds by yelling, mostly to convince himself, "You're not my mother!" By the end of the film, Karras does end up fusing with

Regan's Satanic host as he commands it to take him over instead. Karras is the victim of the female monster's overwhelming demand for sympathy; he succumbs to a collapse in boundaries between self and other.[29] This type of stifling fusion is also provoked by Miriam in *The Hunger,* whose crushing love subjects her partners to a lifetime of vampirism, ending with a painful span of accelerated aging. Miriam gets her due when she is murdered by her lovers' violent affection, as they escape from their coffins to stifle her in their embrace.

Like Miriam's bisexual appeal, the menstrual plot draws both male and female viewers into a painful identification with the monster. It is precisely the fact that horror seems to originate from within the woman's body that allows for a generalized identification with the monster, one that draws in male and female spectators alike. Critics tend to insist on the female monster's status as an ungraspable Other, whose abject body defies comprehension or identification. In her essay on *Carrie,* for example, Shelley Stamp Lindsey writes, "In charting Carrie's path to mature womanhood, the film presents female sexuality as monstrous and constructs femininity as a subject position impossible to occupy."[30] On the contrary, I would argue that the female monstrous body is completely knowable, that it is one of the main sites of predictability in these films. The viewer is trained to expect that once the female body bleeds, it will breed a very predictable form of horror. This predictability compounds our identification with the female monster —her changes and pain become our own.

John Fawcett's cult film *Ginger Snaps* magnifies this predictability in its self-conscious rewriting of *Carrie*. It tells the story of Ginger and Brigitte Fitzgerald, misfit teenage sisters living in small-town Canada. One night, Ginger is bitten by a werewolf, and shortly afterwards she gets her period. Along with the curse come disturbing secondary characteristics, including excessive, fur-like body hair, the growth of a tail, an insatiable sexual appetite and bloodlust. At first, both girls treat Ginger's menstruation as an extreme yet understandable predicament. They know what is supposed to happen when girls get their periods; Ginger, for instance, treats her first cycle as a cliché, telling her sister, "If I start hanging around tampon dispensers, moaning about PMS, shoot me, okay?" When Ginger's symptoms worsen and it becomes clear, as her sister explains, that "something's wrong —like more than you being just female," those around her continue to treat her physical changes as part of normal female development. The girls' mother greets them with touchy-feely discussions about growing up (she announces at the dinner table, "Our little girl's a young woman now"), while the school nurse insists that heavy blood flow (Ginger is gushing at this point) is perfectly normal. Pointing to a chart of the uterus, she tells the sisters, "I'm sure it's a lot of blood; it's a period," and insists on the familiarity of Ginger's story: "Expect it every 28 days . . . for the next 30 years." When Brigitte tries to bring up her sister's severe hirsuteness and abdominal pain, the nurse responds that these symptoms "come with the territory." These reassurances echo Regan's mother's attempts to calm her daughter about her dramatic physical changes with the platitude, "It's just like the doctor said—it's nerves, and that's all. Now just take your pills and you'll be fine, okay?"

The predictability of the female body is antithetical to the male monster's self-mutilations, which can never be reconciled within the formulaic nature of the horror film. The randomness of the masochistic moment shocks us into alienation and forces us to step back from what is to come; we experience the fear of the chase, but with the understanding that we are not really a part of it. Although the ensuing events are predictable—we know that a group of teens will be killed, that a Final Girl will survive—this predictability has little to do with the monsters themselves, whose mystery and terror depend on our distance from them. On the other hand, the menstrual plot displaces this generic predictability onto the female monster's body, forcing us to realize that we know her cramps and cycles as much as if they were our own. The calendar on Ginger's tampon box—or the one on which Rosemary plans her pregnancy—becomes the emblematic object of these narratives of female monstrosity.

Ginger Snaps does explore a different monstrosity, one based on female masochism. The film precedes its menstrual plot by referencing the self-mutilating monsters of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The first time we see the sisters, Brigitte carries a chainsaw while Ginger holds a knife to her wrist in a shot that mirrors the hitchhiker's self-abuse. She casts the knife aside and says, "Wrists are for girls. I'll slit my throat." The sisters then discuss the suicide pact they had made as young children, joining their scarred hands, the mark of their bond, in solidarity. This is followed by an intricate montage of the girls posing in various acts of self-mutilation. Fascinated with their own deaths, they take theatrical photographs of themselves as suicide victims: bloodily impaled on fences, poisoned, drowned, hanged, all in extreme graphic detail.[31] They show a film they have made of these

Puberty brings sex, violence, and excessive hair in *Ginger Snaps*; Right: Ginger plays dead.

scenes to their high-school class, and the reaction they receive is far more dramatic than the school nurse's banal reassurances. After a few unsuccessful stutterings, their male teacher says, "I am completely sickened by that," a comment that echoes the shocked reactions provoked by the monster's masochism. The sisters' faking of monstrous mutilations exposes the masochistic moment as an effective cinematic trope for the production of horror, and, more importantly, one that is not confined to the male monster alone. As the film progresses, however, it soon turns to the more predictable structure of the menstrual plot. The film both critiques and enacts our comfort with the familiarity of female monsters by presenting us with a story that can be mapped over the course of 28 days.

My argument about the horror film's rigid separation of male and female monsters counters other readings that examine the genre's productive dehiscence of gender from sex. Clover argues, for example, that horror, with its many androgynous creatures and victims, "collapse[s] male and female to the point of inextricability."[32] Other critics, such as Creed and Hutchings, apply the argument of the genre's gender instability to the figure of the male monster, whose excessive sufferings, bleedings, and oozings end up feminizing him.[33] These claims depend in large part on the cultural gendering of masochism as a female condition, an association crystalized by Freud in essays such as "A Child Is Being Beaten"(1919) and "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924). Clover suggests that these essays loosen gender categories by opening the female perversion to male subjects: Freud paves the way for "the idea that one's sex/gender/sexuality has no existence outside the acts or performances that constitute it."[34] My analysis points to a more conservative trend in horror cinema's treatment of gender. Monsters who hurt themselves are male in these films, and the violent empowerment that results from their self-inflicted pain has little to do with conventional forms of female submission. Likewise, the menstruating monster exposes her biological identity with every drop of blood she sheds, both her own and her victims'. These essentializing constructions of monstrosity mitigate the films' more revolutionary play with gender and identity categories. They work to reassure audiences that the terrors they are witnessing on screen are containable, that they will not uproot deep-seated beliefs about gender and violence. Whatever else the horror film may stir within us, its gendering of the pain felt by monsters and the sadistic acts they subsequently commit provides an unfortunately reassuring stability. It sets a safe parameter around the spectators' alleged masochism in choosing to sit through a horror film and prevents this "willing subjection"[35] from turning into an act of self-destruction, if not of lives, then of identities. By gendering the monster's pain, the horror genre prevents the audience from losing control of its own.

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Notes

1. As quoted in Scott Allen Nollen, *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life* (Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1999), 42-43.
2. Gary Don Rhodes, *Lugosi* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997), 35.
3. As quoted in David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1993), 68.
4. Ibid., 73-74.
5. This term derives from Paul Smith's essay "Eastwood Bound," in *Constructing Masculinity,* eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 77-97. Smith refers to the "masochistic moment" found in Clint Eastwood films, in which the hero temporarily loses power and suffers. He argues that the action film absorbs this lapse into the narrative itself, so that it loses its disruptive potential.
6. *"Hellraiser," Internet Movie Database,* 4 July 2004 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093177/trivia>.
7. Noël Carroll refers to this as the "paradox of horror," which raises the question of why "anyone [would] subject themselves to it. Normally, we shun what causes distress; most of us don't play in traffic to entertain ourselves. . . ." Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 10.
8. Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 222.
9. Ibid., 61.
10. Peter Hutchings, "Masculinity and the Horror Film," in *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies, and Men,* eds. Pat Kirkham and Janet Thurmin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 84-94.
11. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 24. Freud also refused the possibility of primary masochism in his 1919 essay, "A Child Is Being Beaten."
12. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 66. Freud later acknowledged a primary form of masochism in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924).
13. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.
14. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* the hitchhiker's masochism can also be read as an act of liberation, since two of the teenagers' families were responsible for laying off slaughterhouse workers—including the hitchhiker and his kin—in order to introduce more advanced cattle-killing technology.
15. Linda Brookover and Alain Silver refer to the film as "a love story of operatic dimensions masquerading as a monster flick," in "What Rough Beast?: Insect Politics and *The Fly,*" in *Horror Film Reader,* eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 2000), 237.
16. Helen W. Robbins also remarks on the similarities between the teleporter and the film camera in "'More Human Than I Am Alone': Womb Envy in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers,*" in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema,* eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 145.
17. Laura Mulvey notably writes about the film star as a narcissistic projection of the male spectator in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 201-02. Cronenberg's film is based on Kurt Neumann's 1958 B-movie, *The Fly*.
18. Adam Knee, "The Metamorphosis of *The Fly,*" *Wide Angle* vol. 14, no. 1 (1992): 24.
19. Several critics have commented on Ronnie's role as mediator between Seth and the spectator. See, for example, Cynthia Freedland, "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies,* eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 212; and Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 128-31.
20. The sequel to *The Fly,* Chris Walas's *The Fly II* (1989), kills Ronnie off in the opening sequence of the film when she gives birth to Seth's baby. The narrative remains a male story, focusing on how the son comes to terms with his monstrous legacy.
21. *Fear of God: The Making of* The Exorcist (prod. Nick Freand Jones, 1998). The documentary includes references to the sadism of the film's special effects, which contrast with Lon Chaney's self-imposed suffering. Linda Blair, who played Regan, explains that to film a scene in which she thrashes back and forth on her bed, she was strapped to a pulley system that gave her excruciating pain. She explains that her cries for help, captured in the film's final version, are expressions of real suffering: "That's the footage they used in the movie when I'm crying my eyes out because they're brutally damaging my back." Likewise, Ellen Burstyn, who played Regan's mother, Chris, was seriously hurt in a scene in which the possessed Regan projects an armoire toward her, and Chris jerks back. Although Burstyn had complained about the system used to pull her back, Friedkin allegedly disregarded her complaints and encouraged the special-effects director to "'give it to her this time.'" She remarks that, "It was way beyond what anyone needs to do to make a movie."
22. Sarah's suicide fails, and she adopts Miriam's position as an eternal lover.
23. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 67.
24. Given the horror film's focus on menstruation, it seems significant that the title of the 2002 zombie film *28 Days Later* (dir. Danny Boyle) should feature such a suggestive number. The time it takes for England to be contaminated by a "rage" epidemic is equivalent to the number of days it takes women to reach the peak of their cycles, stereotypically described as a time of rage as well. Further

pointing to its concern with the female body, the film integrates a plot line about its two heroines falling prey to a group of soldiers who, in order to save the swiftly dying British population, try to rape and impregnate them.

25. For a thorough formal comparison of the two scenes, see Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), 279-95. Douglas Keesey draws our attention to the "Bates" parallel in "Patriarchal Mediations of *Carrie:* The Book, the Movie, and the Musical," in *Imagining the Worst: Stephen King and the Representation of Women,* eds. Kathleen Margaret Land and Theresa Thompson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 39.
26. Lindsey, 282.
27. Mrs. White does occupy the role of Saint Sebastian at the end of the film, when Carrie's telekinetic powers pierce her with various knives and household cutting devices. The mother moans with pleasure as she is murdered, and the film draws attention to her resemblance to the statue. The film only allows Mrs. White to enjoy her pain at the end of her life, not as a preface to her monstrosity.
28. Clover, 4.
29. Clover describes Karras's fate as an instance of "opening up," an act of invasion that parallels women's susceptibility to possession: "At the level of representation . . . the male story of occult horror is an echo version of the female story: it tells of being opened up by and to something, letting something in" (101).
30. Lindsey, 281. Barbara Creed makes a similar argument in *The Monstrous-Feminine*. She uses Kristeva's theory of "abjection" to describe the liminal role of the female monster, who comes to stand for the transgression of normative boundaries.
31. A few of the deaths pictured in the montage seem to result from murder rather than suicide (e.g., being run over by a lawnmower). Because the sisters are figured as an indivisible unit in this part of the film, however, these deaths fall into the category of assisted suicides.
32. Clover, 217.
33. Barbara Creed, "Dark Desires: Male Masochism in the Horror Film," in *Screening the Male*, 118-33; Hutchings, 89-91.
34. Clover, 215-16.
35. This is Hutchings's term (92).

Abstract Aviva Briefel examines the ways in which the horror film's gendering of the monster's pain affects audience identification. Male monsters in these films are associated with acts of masochism that allow for a comfortable spectatorial distance. In contrast, female monsters precede their sadistic rampages with moments of menstruation, which claustrophobically draw their audiences to them.

Bob Mielke

Rhetoric and Ideology in the Nuclear Test Documentary

The "Mike" explosion from *Operation Ivy*:
the money shot of nuclear technoporn

The nuclear test documentary is a little-known subgenre of documentary activity. Most people are aware of these films—financed by the government in order to provide a lasting record of the detonation of nuclear devices—only because of *The Atomic Cafe,* a 1982 release compiled by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, and Pierce Rafferty. This satiric feature was released at the height of the nuclear freeze movement (which was in turn responding to the Reagan administration's surreal handling of the arms race).[1] A modest arthouse success, it walks the viewer through 37 years of the atomic age by combining (then) recently declassified military footage with newsreels, training films, instructional films, commercials and, yes, nuclear test documentaries such as *Operation Ivy* (1952) and *Operation Buster Jangle* (1951). *The Atomic Cafe*'s boldest move was a concluding sequence that staged a nuclear war using preposterously cheery civil defense simulations alongside actual military footage. The "Dad" figure takes charge scant seconds after the attack: "Children, you better clear up the broken glass and all this debris. All in all, I would say we've been very lucky around here. Nothing to do now but wait for orders from the authorities and relax."[2]

The Atomic Cafe raises issues that are relevant to the "straight" atomic test documentary—and indeed documentary production in general. One example is the oft-levied charge of "fakery," perhaps best laid to rest by Brian Winston's position of "mild realism" regarding the documentary: "One can still see something of the world."[3] But documentary filmmakers have faked footage since a tabletop recreation of the Battle of Santiago Bay for a Spanish-American War newsreel, to say nothing of the fictions and embellishments of Robert Flaherty and his many followers.[4] Filmmakers do what they need to do, beginning with the selection of the images. From there, it's a slippery slope to the production of dramatic effects through montage, editing, and overt reconstruction of events. The concluding nuclear holocaust in *The Atomic Cafe* perfectly illustrates this fakery in its most harmless guise: surely no adult watching the film could assume this had any relation to a real nuclear attack. Similarly, in an actual test documentary such as *Operation Ivy,* little harm is done by imposing the conceit that the film takes place an hour before a nuclear test. Scientists and engineers readily stop their arcane labors to talk to the film crew; though straining mimesis, this

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approach imposes a more structured narrative onto the film, making this probably the most aesthetically satisfying of the test documentaries.

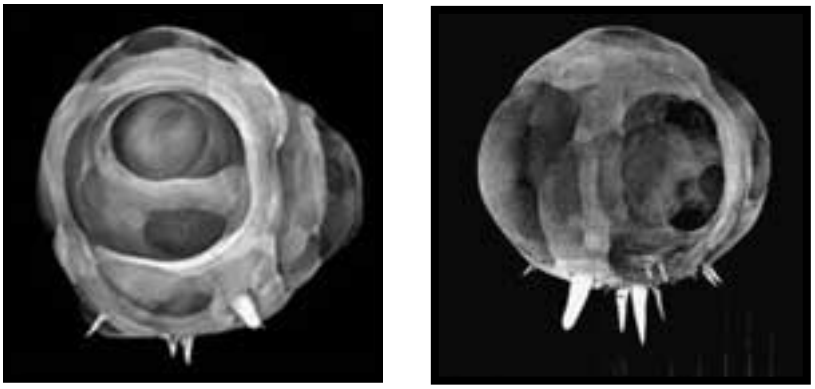
A more problematic charge levied against *The Atomic Cafe,* nuclear test documentaries, and documentary in general is that of propaganda. Erik Barnouw notes the irony of this criticism: "The term is invoked precisely when the film has failed as propaganda. When the choices please us, we do not invoke it."[5] Some of the choices in *The Atomic Cafe* have not aged well. For instance, an army narrator observes that "In times of social crisis and tension, in times when . . . the individual knows that something is wrong but doesn't know what, when he feels himself a pawn, in times like these most men become highly suggestible. They listen eagerly for any voice which sounds authoritative."[6] His statement immediately segues into a campaign song for "Eisenhower, man of the hour," with accompanying footage. Moments like this seem a bit mean-spirited and historically smug. Eisenhower's subsequent "Spiritual Strength of America" speech in the film, to say nothing of his later warnings with regard to the "military-industrial complex," suggest Ike was far more reflective about the arms race than some of his successors. And surely our last Presidential "election" gives us little grounds for feeling superior to this 1952 democratic event.

Similarly, nuclear test documentaries have their propagandistic moments—as Barnouw indicates, precisely when they fail to please and/or convince. As we shall see, virtually every documentary made about nuclear testing posits that conducting and observing nuclear explosions is really a scientific endeavor, not geopolitical saber-rattling. For many viewers, this smacks of a certain disingenuousness.

In addition to the more wide-ranging documentary issues these films raised by these films, they have significant problems that *The Atomic Cafe* does not have. After all, Loader and the Raffertys were only using found footage. So they cannot be accused of a third relevant objection to documentary production—the endangerment of the subject. The actual nuclear test documentaries they quote, however, show troops from Camp Desert Rock swallowing radioactive dirt near ground zero; the accompanying scientific commentary suggests that this exposure will lead to further health problems.[7] Admittedly, the documentary photographers were only cogs in a large military machine, and they may not have known the radiological dangers to which they and their subjects were being exposed. Yet it is scarcely conceivable that any similar approach would be allowed today.

The world we are about to explore is thus an uncanny world, although it is still our world. Since the radioactive half-life of plutonium 239 is 24,000 years, we are far from seeing the end results of our cold war hubris. Radiation continues to seep from such nuclear weapons production sites as Hanford, the Savannah River Plant, and the Nevada Test Site. The Pacific proving grounds at Bikini atoll in the Marshall Islands are still not habitable on a long-term basis.[8] So even though the violence of bomb testing seems condensed into a few frames of a mushroom cloud, it is a violence that lingers and kills in the present day and far beyond—as if we could still die from military choices made by the Greeks in the Peloponnesian Wars.

In 1947, a special film studio was created by the Air Force at Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood hills in anticipation of the need to document nuclear testing. Before this institutionalization of nuclear documentary production, U. S. Army Signal Corps cameramen handled the first photographic records of the nuclear age.[9] Photographic coverage of Trinity was adequate, but there was less satisfaction with the bombing footage from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[10] As if to compensate for the jerky hand-held work done during the atomic bombings, one and a half million feet of film was exposed during Operation Crossroads at Bikini atoll in 1946.[11] So much film stock was used, in fact, that there was a "worldwide shortage . . . for months" following the operation.[12] The two tests (Able and Baker) were shot from every conceivable angle, distance, and film speed both as a historical record and to gather information about the behavior of the individual devices (data now generated at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories by means of computer modeling). Operation Crossroads was a start, but the inception a year later of the new 1352nd Photographic Group at the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station studio in California offered vastly enhanced resources for the military-industrial complex. The MIT-originated contractors Edgerton, Germeshausen and Grier (later affiliated with Area 51) developed for Lookout Mountain high-speed "Rapatronic" cameras that could shoot up to 15 million images per second, thereby enabling nuclear reactions to be studied at their very instant of origin.[13] This self-contained secret studio produced, directed, and edited 6500 documentary films between 1947 and 1969 that addressed concerns of civil defense, science, technology, and the military. Many of these films remain classified to this day.[14] Since the end of the cold war, many others are beginning to be made available, albeit



The rapatronic camera, capable of filming 15,000,000 frames per second, captures nuclear explosions at their inception.

in some cases with expurgated ("sanitized") audio and/or video.

Michael Light cautions us in *100 Suns,* his recent collection of still photographs recording nuclear explosions, that we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg here:

> Only a small fraction of the extensive documentation of nuclear tests by Lookout Mountain and the Army Signal Corps can now be found in publicly accessible U.S. government archives. . . . [T]hat hidden mass of material . . . may have been lost, deliberately destroyed, or [kept] classified. In some ways, however, the archive images that are available do speak more of absence than of presence. One cannot help but wonder what as citizens we still do not know about the subject of nuclear weapons, not only in the sense of the surreal excesses of the Cold War past, but in terms of the hidden, weaponized nuclear present that will be with us as long as we know time.[15]

Even acknowledging this ultimate "absence" (which I will not resist speculating about below), there is still much that *is* present to be considered in these films. I will proceed by first describing the general "house style" of all the Lookout Mountain films I have seen and then elaborating on the most sophisticated of these works, *Operation Ivy,* as indicative of the studio at its best. The salient features I shall consider may not necessarily be found in any given film; however, they recur enough to be representative.

Overall, the camera work in these documentaries is pedestrian and functional, a largely unobtrusive window on the testing. As such, it resembles more the spirit of so-called "ephemeral" films (collected for Voyager Press and Criterion) such as instructional or industrial documentaries rather than works in the great documentary tradition. The only exception to this general rule is an interest in recording some of the blasts, the expensive "money shot" of this nuclear technoporn, from multiple camera angles. This disruption of strict narrative flow hearkens back to the early days of cinema before directors such as D. W. Griffith standardized the conventions of film narrative. One also wonders if the Lookout Mountain films may have influenced Antonioni and/or De Palma, directors who handle climactic explosions in a similar manner in, respectively, *Zabriskie Point* and *The Fury*.

The storytelling in these documentaries is also straightforward and linearly progressive, except for the occasional use of flashbacks.[16] The musical flourishes provided by Air Force bands and the like are knockoff 19th-century romanticism: sublime frissons for the explosions, but with no interest in the atonality or tone clustering used by contemporary composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki for similar programmatic reasons. The desired musical connotation here is that of awe and wonderment, but for the most part not a sense of chaos and dread.[17] With the exception of *Operation Ivy,* the voiceover narration is in the familiar "March of Time" voice-of-God style.

A number of the Lookout Mountain films use the conceit of being a filmic book: they begin with a military official pulling a book off a shelf with the test series as its title. The open book's first page then moves from a still image to the beginning of the film report; at the conclusion, the image freezes and we return to the book, which is closed and (sometimes) put back on its shelf.[18]

The most striking rhetorical feature of the voiceover in these films is a relentlessly cheery use of similes and metaphors to naturalize the uncanniness of

these weapons and their testing. Again and again, the exotic is put into downright folksy contexts. A few examples should suffice. The "Gadget" at the Trinity Test is compared to a cement mixer.[19] The discovery of the bomb is compared to the invention of gunpowder.[20] Testing itself is "a date with destiny"—apparently the workings of fate, not human agency.[21] The testing areas are like a "university campus . . . Enewetak University," or "the valley where the tall mushrooms grow."[22] The GIs at Camp Desert Rock have joined "a fraternity . . . the Order of the Mushroom."[23]

In like manner, test preparations are "labor pains."[24] The massing of materiel on Kwajalein atoll makes it "as hard to find a parking space as in downtown Fort Worth on dollar day."[25] The bomb has "more of a kick than all the mules in Missouri."[26]

This breezy narration, weirdly reminiscent of pulp detective fiction and film noir voiceover, reassures the viewer that we are not in a completely new and incomprehensible situation here. This rhetorical approach is a prominent feature in the Lookout Mountain films. In the early Sixties when other organizations made test documentaries, the voiceover becomes much more literal and understated.[27]

Thematically, these films traffic in antinomies and paradoxes. Perhaps a better term for the tension in their content is complementarity. As Richard Rhodes has pointed out, Danish physicist Niels Bohr extended his scientific notion of complementarity (light as sometimes best explainable as a particle, sometimes as a wave) to the politics of the bomb resultant from these discoveries: "the bomb for Bohr . . . was a weapon of death that might also end war and redeem mankind."[28] This Janus-faced aspect of the bomb seems to permutate into many paradoxical forms in the test documentaries.

One such notable tension has to do with the safety of bomb testing, in juxtaposition with a clear, if muted, sense that participants in the tests are guinea pigs encountering the unpredictable effects of the mighty atom. On the one hand, the narrator of *Operation Crossroads* assures us that there was "no danger" from Shot Able, the 1946 airdropped bomb. After all, "no serious amount of radioactivity remains on the ground" after an airburst.[29] (Tell that to the *hibskusha* who witnessed the airbursts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki!) The GIs in the "Operation Tumbler/Snapper" test documentary "thought they'd never be able to have families," but "made it" by using "a little common sense." In *Operation Buster/Jangle,* the military finds out that the fallout from a test will blow south to Mexico. "Okay by me," one responds: not our problem! And since radiation causes only 10 percent of bomb deaths, it is the "least of [a soldier's] worries."[30]

We still get glimpses of the other side of the picture, however. The narrator of *Operation Crossroads* admits that the test animals on the ships "substitute for military personnel"—a hint of things to come. The footage in the same film of Test Baker, the underwater explosion, ends abruptly after showing personnel, in some cases with minimal radiological protection, rushing to board the target ships immediately after they were drenched in the highly lethal spray. One suspects censorship of the full photographic record of radiological negligence regarding optimal safety procedures. The notorious GI footage from the Nevada Test Site repeatedly shows men getting clobbered by radioactive dust in their trenches, after which they march toward ground zero.[31] This human experimentation parallels the equally suppressed footage of animal testing.[32] When one sees both sets of footage, it is hard not to draw parallels (duly noticed by the directors of *The Atomic Cafe*).

Beyond this photographic evidence (including a rare shot in the Lookout Mountain oeuvre of scientists scrambling for cover from a runaway rocket), these documentaries rarely acknowledge radiological danger in the voiceover.[33] The sole exception seems to be in an eponymous 1954 documentary on Operation Castle. The narrator candidly admits there were fallout problems as a result of wind pattern and weather miscalculations. Not that this was such a great concession: the radioactive poisoning of a Japanese fishing trawler and some Marshall islanders from the test, the largest atmospheric explosion at 15 megatons that the U.S. ever conducted, had made international news.[34]

GIs observe a mushroom cloud at the Nevada Test Site; later they must march toward ground zero.

Another dimension of the complementarity of the bomb revealed in these test documentaries is its dual status as scientific experiment and potential weapon in future warfare. Understandably, the former aspect is given the most emphasis because of its cheerier implications. Enewetak is described as a "laboratory island" for "scientific experiment[s]" needed for "peacetime applications" (agricultural and medical uses for radiation) as well as military development.[35] Even the documentaries on blast damage at Hiroshima and Nagasaki emphasize the technical knowledge gleaned about building structures and blast phenomenology rather than any other emotional, ethical, or metaphysical response.[36]

Admittedly, in the case of Operation Argus, such a stance was almost justified. The 1958 Argus experiment came unusually close to pure science. Its plan was to insert particles from a very high-altitude nuclear explosion into the earth's magnetic field, enabling scientists to both study the field in general and in particular to track how the magnetic field processes radiation. As a result, we find more graphics and scientific explanation in this documentary. In addition to the military value of the test (blast effects of high-altitude detonations), we are assured that Argus offered "pure scientific material of great value," and was "a worldwide laboratory experiment."[37]

Because of this scientific value imputed to the tests in the Lookout Mountain films, the need could be posited for endless continuation of the testing: science never stops.[38] These remarks typically occur at the very conclusion of the documentaries. The "Operation Hardtack" film's discussion of the electromagnetic pulse effect of the bomb (EMP), and its thermal effects on sundry substances, are guarded: it's "too early to make conclusions"; "further study" is "needed." The tests of Operation Plumbob in the film of the same name were "vital as a basis for future findings." Weapons data could still be gathered—and was—after atmospheric testing was banned (and eventually all testing ceased), but these films argued for its continuation as long as they could.

The obvious military dimension of these weapons, by contrast, is only implied in the Lookout Mountain documentaries, albeit strongly: a shot of troops marching into the clouds on a military exercise is obviously not entirely about science.[39] By contrast, some of the documentaries made by the services for in-house consumption are more candid. An air force film about Operation Sandstone suggests that the mushroom cloud footage offers "a grim warning about the next war."[40] The air force assumes such a war will come and wants to be prepared—no talk of agriculture or medicine here as in the Lookout Mountain documentary on the very same operation.

The ideological slant of these films with regard to race and gender is not terribly surprising. Enewetak is described as a "distant and primitive" place (hence utterly expendable?). Its testing islands are strung out "like beads of a necklace."[41] The Marshall Islands were literally spoils of war for the United States, ripe for our neocolonial exploitation. As *The Atomic Cafe* shows, King Judah and his people were completely misled about the tests and their consequences in order to persuade them to move off the blast islands. The "necklace" simile both reinforces the ostensible primitivism of the place and feminizes it (given cultural biases of the time about who gets to wear a necklace), We are not far from F. Scott Fitzgerald's "green breast of the new world": colonialism as ravishment of the primitive feminine.

The other striking example of neocolonial appropriation evident in these films was the use of Native American nomenclature in conjunction with the tests, an extravagant expansion of similar tendencies in the naming of sports teams. The seventeen tests documented in *Operation Redwing* (1956) were all named after Native American tribes, an oddity that passes without comment on the voiceover. A year earlier, Operation Wigwam tested an underwater nuclear device 400 miles west/southwest of San Diego to observe blast effects on submersibles. To save expense, the navy did not use actual submarines, but rather built quasi-sub mockup hulls dubbed, alas, "squaws."[42] These lexical borrowings indicate the imperialist arrogance of the nuclear testing project and suggest the ignorance about Native American culture implicit in vicariously attributing to it such environmental degradation.

These test documentaries also link the bomb to the values of church and state. In the "Operation Greenhouse" documentary, a final montage of blast footage segues to the U. S. Capitol building to assure us that these tests are the democratic will of the people expressed through their elected officials, not the sinister machinations of a national security state. Blast effects tests discovered that houses neatly painted white with clean yards survived an atomic detonation better than unkempt houses with trash in the yard (a greater fire risk). Good civil defense information, but also a tacit endorsement of the Protestant work ethic. The bomb helps those who help themselves.[43]

The gender politics of the documentaries evince similarly conservative values. Beyond the metaphori-

cal evocations of the feminine noted above, women are conspicuous in their absence in these films. In all the documentaries that I viewed, only one—an air force documentary not produced by Lookout Mountain—shows a woman present. In the film in question, she is working on the construction of drone radiation-sampling planes for "Radiation, Inc." out of Orlando, Florida.[44] Nuclear testing was a boys' club by and large, a point brought home abundantly on the otherwise more scientific "Operation Argus" film. Amidst all the technical explanations, there is a bizarre frolic involving Davy Jones, King Neptune, and his court hazing the "polliwogs" on the test ship who have crossed the equator for the first time. It's as if the personnel are compensating for the rarefied nature of the experiment with macho hijinx.

Such are the salient features of these nuclear test documentaries as a general subgenre. Let us now turn to *Operation Ivy* (1952) in particular. Its narrative sophistication and enhanced production values make it arguably the best example of the Lookout Mountain studio's output during its peak years. Comparatively greater care was lavished on this film because it recorded the first test of a thermonuclear device, "Mike." Although this was not as important a scientific breakthrough as Enrico Fermi's sustained chain reaction at Stagg Field in 1942, or even as significant an engineering revolution as the Trinity test in 1945, the increase in destructive power afforded by a hydrogen device (admittedly a new reaction of fusion rather than fission) made the military importance of the test inflate the rhetoric of its scientific significance. Let us, then, examine the film *Operation Ivy* in terms of its formal cinematic logic, its ideological content, and the responses it has engendered in some of its intended audiences.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have offered film scholars a formal heuristic for organizational options of classification in cinema.[45] Having said that, *Operation Ivy* constitutes a slight anomaly. Although it is predominantly constructed along a narrative line, the story of the hour preceding the Mike blast, it also has a family resemblance to the non-narrative logical arrangement of classification, a logic that permeates virtually all other nuclear test documentaries produced by the Lookout Mountain studio. The narrative of *Operation Ivy* is structured not by a quest or a mystery (as a film about applied nuclear physics could indeed be), but by the fulfillment of a desire: a wish to blow off a really big and new kind of bomb. (Clearly a wish of Thanatos; but after Kubrick, we must add Eros as well: "Strangelove.") This rhetoric appears at key moments in the film. For example, just before the final seconds of the countdown, the narrator cues us: "For the sake of all of us, and for the sake of our country, I know you join me in wishing this expedition well."[46]

Narrative desire is also adumbrated by the relentless crashing of waves against the shore of the atoll that both opens and concludes the film. This opening would not be so significant and evocative if it were not such an unusual feature of the test documentaries produced by this studio. (As noted, most are framed by a military official pulling a book off a shelf with the test series as its title, then returning it.) Furthermore, the narrator's voiceover at the end of *Operation Ivy* strives for some poetic Promethean gestures:

> I have a sort of inadequate feeling . . . so much more could be said. Nothing is really over. . . . [This is only] a breathing spell. . . . What is new today is old tomorrow. And of the day after tomorrow, who knows what these Pacific islands may see?

These words are accompanied by a romantic musical leitmotif, a kind of "H-bomb theme," also used when the Mike device is detonated.

I have already alluded to the film's feigned setting as the hour before the test. This illusion of a preserved unity of time adds to the suspense and rising interest in a manner similar to films such as *Rope* or *Nick of Time,* or the Fox television series *24*. Other highly theatrical elements in the documentary include the narrator's professional abilities as an actor, which contrast with the other players interviewed on screen. In some of the external shots on the deck of the ship, the narrator seems to have pronounced key lighting on his face. All of these features subtly enhance the spectacle, and would probably go unremarked by an audience not yet aware of the technical results of practiced cinéma vérité.

The narrative takes other theatrical liberties as well. Characters recounting their role in test preparations are allowed flashback sequences. Occasionally, the narrator uses a second-person address when he's providing a voiceover: "And you, Colonel, what are you thinking?" These flashbacks subtly remind us that the entire film is a flashback. If the test ran away from the task force, the documentary would not exist. Along with the suspense, there is reassurance. The narrative is not as preordained as James Cameron's *Titanic* (a foregone conclusion except for the exceedingly historically challenged). Rather it resembles a

John Wayne Western: we know the good guys are going to win.

For this subgenre of documentary, this film's narrative approach is much more rare than the non-narrative structure of classification, which *Operation Ivy* also uses in a manner more typical of other test documentaries. This documentary logic of classification is most readily illustrated by Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*—a film that organizes itself primarily by the specific contests of the 1936 Munich Olympics. In nuclear test documentaries, the classificatory structure divides the films into categories of "experiments" run with the test and/or separate contributions to the test contributed by the scientific community and various branches of the armed forces (as in *Dr. Strangelove*'s debates between the air force and the army in the war room, never underestimate the power of interservice rivalry when high-prestige weapons like nukes are around). In *Operation Ivy,* the narrator talks, by turns, to a scientist who explains the cryogenically cooled dewar that holds the liquid deuterium for the thermonuclear burn, the firing party that armed the device, another scientist (Alvin Graves) who explains the reaction, and General Clarkson, the commander of Joint Task Force 132. At the end of these separate interviews, we are presented with an orchestral score and a montage of all the laborers who constructed the buildings on the test atolls: the little people. This is followed by a brief description of the various experiments conducted during the Mike shot, a switch from classification by people to classification by types of technical knowledge. This subtle shift from personalities to instrumentality reinforces the aforementioned central ideological thrust of all these test documentaries: that conducting and observing nuclear explosions is primarily about scientific research, not military preparedness. And so I have deliberately invoked the name of Leni Riefenstahl: her *Olympia* is arguably organized more according to Bordwell and Thompson's non-narrative structural category of rhetorical logic, merely disguised as classificatory logic. (Consider *Olympia*'s cult of the beautiful body as an endorsement of eugenic theory and its opening linkage of ancient Greece and Nazi Germany through the path of the bearer of the Olympic torch.) Similarly, these test documentaries are ultimately rhetorical in thrust behind their classificatory gestures. They offer simultaneously a rationale for previous testing and an incitement for future weapons tests. That was their primary purpose for an intended audience of military personnel, politicians, and selected journalists and educators. For the military viewer, there is a rhetorical subtext of the joys and virtues of interservice cooperation. Working together, we can explode some huge devices in exotic desert and South Pacific locales.

My first public viewing of *Operation Ivy* was in a high school history class, where it was presented without comment as a slice of cold war life to help us comprehend the enormous forces developed in the nuclear arms race. I recall being impressed by the science and technology of the H-bomb (like many, I was a product of the post-Sputnik encouragement of science and math) and curiously devoid of any suspicions that I was being manipulated in any way by the film. Not being that involved in the military—I was destined for the Vietnam era lottery, so the military would come to me—I also missed the interservice subtext.

My far more remarkable second public screening of *Operation Ivy* was at the National Association of Radiation Survivors (NARS) Fall 1987 convention in St. Louis. At the opening night gathering in the suite of the executive director (then the late Dorothy Legarreta), one of the members brought a videotape of the film to screen. The response to the film was extremely varied, ranging from nostalgia (we had a good time at those test expeditions) through fearful reminiscence (recollections of how the "Teller light" of the thermonuclear reaction exposed the bones in their hands and how the heat even 35 miles away was terrifyingly intense, growing to open blast-furnace levels without any sign of dissipation) to frank disdain on the part of many in the room (don't dredge up that painful past). Given the concerns of NARS, and its members present or deceased who had developed illnesses resulting from the exposure, the video seemed in as dubious taste as showing *Triumph of the Will* at a convention of holocaust survivors.[47] It is tempting to read the difference between the reception of these two screenings as indicative of our culture becoming resistant viewers of yesterday's cold war texts. Nonetheless, I must also acknowledge other variables at work here: the age of the viewers, as well as our ever-increasing awareness of the lingering effects of nuclear testing.

In the present day, I suspect our response to these films works along a basic continuum ranging from fear and fascination about the "Nazi doctor" dimensions of these documentaries, to fear and fascination about the "nuclear sublime" (whether straight up or, frequently, heavily ironized). By the "Nazi doctor" aspect I mean our post-cold-war interest and anxiety about precisely how close we came to the contempt for human dignity and life exhibited in the death camps during the era in which these films were produced.

Even today this is a rude question for some (witness the uproar over the Smithsonian plans for the *Enola Gay* exhibit in 1995); during the Fifties, only a few intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt and Lewis Mumford were noting the parallels between our instrumentalism and that of the Third Reich. But, like it or not, the Department of Energy under Hazel O'Leary gave credence to what had previously had the status of mere urban legend: the feeding of plutonium to children with Down's syndrome, expectant mothers, and prisoners—mostly unbeknownst to these human guinea pigs.[48] Given the magnitude of this moral slippage, the Lookout Mountain films encourage a paranoiac reading between the lines for signs of other transgressions. The very unholy grail of bomb cinema here is Operation Plumbbob, Shot Hood, from July 5, 1957. Very little footage of this test has been declassified. At 74 kilotons, it was the largest test ever done in the continental United States. The Defense Nuclear Agency has revealed that, despite official policy, it was a hydrogen bomb.[49] And a number of eyewitnesses (GIs who marched toward ground zero after the test) saw something that would haunt them for the rest of their lives:

> We'd only gone a short way when one of my men said, "Jesus Christ, look at that!" I looked where he was pointing, and what I saw horrified me. There were people in a stockade—a chain-link fence with barbed wire on top of it. Their hair was falling out and their skin seemed to be peeling off. They were wearing blue denim trousers but no shirts. . . . Good God, it was scary.[50]

Those who saw this human experiment, presumably with convicts, were quarantined and debriefed never to talk about it. Only as these individuals contracted various cancers have they spoken out to oral historians and journalists such as Carole Gallagher. Such claims, of course, can never be proven. (Could they have seen mannequins? But why would mannequins be behind a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire?) Still, Hazel O'Leary's revelations make one wonder. In any case, Hollywood and beyond has been obsessed with the secret of human experimentation at nuclear tests, from such Fifties films as *The Amazing Colossal Man,* through Eighties films such as *Nightbreaker, Ground Zero* (an Australian film about exposing aboriginal populations) and *Spontaneous Combustion* (a Tobe Hooper horror film), right up to *Mulholland Falls*. The contemporary viewer of nuclear test documentaries, as a result, keeps an eye on the periphery for secrets that slip through the censors. I regret to say that so far for me it has been a vain undertaking—government censors are very good at what they do—but such desires to see what lies under the rock constitute a real scopic pleasure for those who screen these films now.

Ultimate revelations of evil aside, these documentaries show the high-water mark of the militarization of American culture. This was the only decade of the twentieth century that elected a general to the American presidency. Historians such as Elaine Tyler May and Laura McEnaney have demonstrated how the military and its policies served as a template for conducting domestic life in this era, a trend most amusingly seen in bizarre instructional films (such as *A Date with Your Family* [1950]) which "teach" the bourgeoisie how to share dinner, court, and say goodnight in a manner that oddly echoes military regimentation.[51] The Department of Defense spent 354 billion uninflated dollars during Ike's presidency. And John F. Kennedy won in 1960 by claiming Eisenhower hadn't spent enough, thereby creating a "missile gap."[52] Under such conditions, one almost wonders why *Operation Ivy* had to take such an apologetic tone in emphasizing the scientific significance of Mike. Its military importance should have played well enough.

At the other end of the spectrum of contemporary response to these documentaries is our ambiguous attitude toward the nuclear sublime, the transcendent moment of detonation with which all these films climax. A nuclear test documentary needs an explosion! The cold war frisson of such a moment was, for many, "I am seeing how I will probably die," or at least, "I am seeing how I might perish." Its appeal became more kitsch between the cold war and the events of September 11th. In that interval, the big blasts merely evoked Frank Zappa's "cheesy atom-bomb explosion that all the big groups use," or the flash-bombs of Pink Floyd ("Careful with That Axe, Eugene"), Kiss, and a host of heavy metal practitioners.[53] At the root of it all seemed to be boys exploding things in the backyard.[54]

We're not laughing so much these days, now that we've found Al Qaeda training manuals that confidently predict that the terrorist will inevitably acquire nuclear weapons in the future. Who dares gainsay this claim? The ironic dimensions of the nuclear sublime are receding: these films are regaining some of their terror and bleak poetry. But we will never watch them with the same Strangelovian eyes as some cold warriors did when they first were produced. Nor should we. For they are a guilty pleasure at best, as Michael Light so effectively elaborates:

> It is difficult to comprehend the mechanics and effects of just one such distillation of brilliant human savagery, much less the some hundred thousand nuclear weapons that have been fabricated by nations since the Trinity test. Any conscious person instinctively turns away. That is why these photographic images from the era of atmospheric nuclear detonation remain utterly relevant, beyond the historic interest of the extreme moment they capture. Photographs only tell us about the surface of things, about how things look. When it's all we have, however, it's enough to help understanding. It exists. It happened. It is happening. May no further nuclear detonation photographs be made, ever.

How can we not agree?

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Notes

1. See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
2. Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, and Pierce Rafferty, *The Atomic Cafe: The Book of the Film* (New York: Peacock Press/Bantam, 1982), 117.
3. Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2000), 166.
4. Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film,* 2nd revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 24.
5. Ibid., 345.
6. Rafferty, 54.
7. Ibid., 73-4.
8. In Michael Light's *100 Suns: 1945-1962* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), he duly notes that, "Enewetak [atoll] has been successfully restored and resettled" ("A Note on the Photographs, n.p.). This is surprising and impressive accomplishment given the extent of nuclear testing that occurred there before the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963. In an earlier version of this article, I had lumped Enewetak with Bikini as an example of lingering environmental devastation—a seemingly safe assumption. I am happy to stand corrected.
9. Barnouw, 307.
10. The best footage was shot on the ground by Akira Iwasaki, a left-wing Japanese filmmaker who served time in prison during the war for his pacifist views (see Erik Barnouw, "*Hiroshima-Nagasaki*: The Case of the A-Bomb Footage," in *New Challenges for Documentary,* ed. Alan Rosenthal [Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1988], 581-91). The U. S. Army confiscated the footage. Erik Barnouw eventually discovered its existence and edited the raw footage into a haunting film in the late 1960s. *Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945* is now readily available through distributors such as Facets in Chicago.

    If you can obtain it, there is also a 1981 Japanese collection of still photography (translated as *Our Cameras Saw That Day*), which contains some remarkable, tacitly suppressed images of the bombings and their aftereffects. Most astonishingly, one photographer caught a picture of the rising Hiroshima mushroom cloud immediately after detonation. We're familiar with this archetypal image, but not on the ground from below the cloud!
11. "The Atomic Filmmakers: Behind the Scenes," videocassette directed by Peter Kuran (Goldhill Video, 1998).
12. Light, caption for image 58, n.p.
13. Ibid., caption for image 3 et al., n.p.
14. "The Atomic Filmmakers."
15. Light, "A Note on the Photographs," n.p.
16. See, for example, *Operation Sandstone,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1949 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 2: Operation Sandstone* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]) and *Operation Ivy,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1952 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 3: Operation Ivy* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]).
17. See *Operation Sandstone* and *Operation Ivy*.
18. See *Operation Sandstone*; *Operation Tumbler/Snapper,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1952 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 5: Human Guinea Pigs* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]); *Operation Teapot,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1955 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 9: Operation Teapot* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]); *Operation Upshot/Knothole,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1953 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 10: Upshot-Knothole* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]); *Operation Redwing,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1956 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 11: The Redwing Story* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]); and *Operation Plumbbob,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1957 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 15: The Plumbob* [sic] *Story* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]).
19. *Operation Trinity,* directed by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1945 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 1: The Early Tests: Operations Trinity and Crossroads* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]).
20. *Operation Crossroads,* directed by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1946 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 1: The Early Tests: Operations Trinity and Crossroads* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]).
21. *Operation Sandstone.*
22. *Operation Greenhouse,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1951 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 4: Nuclear Air Power* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]); *Operation Buster/Jangle,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1951 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 6: Operation Buster-Jangle* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]).
23. *Operation Tumbler/Snapper*.
24. Ibid.

25. *Operation Ivy*.
26. *Operation Sandstone*.
27. See *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 14: Proliferation* (Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998).
28. Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 572.
29. *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 8: Desert Rock to Redwing* (Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. See *Operation Crossroads, The Redwing Story, Operation Plumbbob,* and *Operation Hardtack* (directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1958; collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 12: Operation Hardtack* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]).
33. *Operation Hardtack.*
34. *Operation Castle,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1954 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 4: Nuclear Air Power* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997]).
35. *Operation Sandstone*.
36. See *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 7: Atomic Destruction* (Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1997).
37. *Operation Argus,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1958 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 13: Argus and Wigwam* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]).
38. See the conclusion of *Operation Buster/Jangle,* for example.
39. Although it contributed to the bizarre field of "blast biology": see Tom Vanderbilt, *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 87.
40. *Operation Sandstone*.
41. *Operation Greenhouse*.
42. *Operation Wigwam,* directed by Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, 1955 (collected in *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 13: Argus and Wigwam* [Atwood Keeney Productions, Inc.: 1998]).
43. See the end of *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 5: Human Guinea Pigs,* the "blast effects reel."
44. See the end of *America's Atomic Bomb Tests, Volume 9: Operation Teapot*.
45. All of these allusions to Bordwell and Thompson refer to their textbook *Film Art: An Introduction,* 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).
46. *Operation Ivy.*
47. I will stand by this sentence, despite the rough legal time the government has given atomic veterans. I refer the skeptical, for starters, to Carole Gallagher's fine book *American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War* (Boston MA: MIT Press, 1993).
48. See Eileen Welsome, *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War* (New York: Dial Press, 1999).
49. According to Michael Light, there were three planned thermonuclear tests in Nevada in actual and potential violation of "a longstanding 'gentleman's agreement' between the Federal Government and the Department of Defense that the nuclear weapons labs would not detonate a hydrogen bomb at the Nevada Test Site" (caption for image 18, n.p.). After Shot Hood, the smaller thermonuclear Shot Smoky (44 kilotons) was exploded on August 31, 1957. A third planned explosion, Charleston, "fizzled" on September 28, 1957. (The fission explosion failed to ignite the fusion reaction, keeping the yield at 12 kilotons.) All three devices came from Edward Teller's rival laboratory to Los Alamos at Livermore (Light, captions for images 1, 18, 23, 24; n.p.).
50. Gallagher, 61-3.
51. *A Date with Your Family* is collected in *You Can't Get There from Here: Ephemeral Films 1946-1960* compiled by Richard Prelinger (Voyager Press, 1987). The historical texts I'm alluding to are Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families and the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1988) and Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
52. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War,* 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 58-9, 90.
53. Frank Zappa, "Be in My Video" from *Them or Us* (Barking Pumpkin Records, 1984).
54. In *The Years* (1937; New York: Harcourt, 1965), which I read after writing this sentence, Virginia Woolf has a character make a similar observation after a World War I zeppelin raid on London: "Only children letting off fireworks in the back garden" (293). How far we haven't come!

Abstract In this article Bob Mielke offers the first sustained scholarship on the bizarre cold war films made by the obscure Lookout Mountain Air Force Station studio. These films have only recently become available to the general public. Mielke explores their common structure, freighted ideological perspective, and reception over time.

Reviews

The Triplets of Belleville (Les Triplettes de Belleville)

Director/writer: Sylvain Chomet. Producer: Didier Brunner. Lead Animators: Chomet, Benoît Féroumont, and Jean-Christophe Lie. Music: Benoît Charest and Mathieu Chedid. Sony Pictures Classics.

French animation has been undergoing a stunning renaissance over the past decade, and for international audiences, *The Triplets of Belleville* is its most visible representative. Previously, the most famous animated feature from France had been René Laloux's *The Fantastic Planet*. Laloux's abstract political allegory, which won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1973, was a defining moment for French animation. In Sylvain Chomet's *The Triplets of Belleville,* as in the earlier film, there is no attempt to follow Disney-esque, generic story structures or to mimic the editing or camerawork of live action. Chomet creates a rich and coherent world that moves at a delirious pace, while his visual world owes a great deal to specifically French contexts, including 1930s music, Jacques Tati, the Tour de France, poster art, and comic books. His choice of color, shapes, and settings helps produce a time and place that is at once bizarre and familiar. *The Triplets of Belleville* is reminiscent of *Delicatessen* (Caro and Jeunet, 1991): an unsettling nostalgia permeates the project, as the characters inhabit a surreal world, clutching onto a life that may have already past.

Champion races his bicycle.

Fittingly, Chomet mixes traditional 2-D drawing with contemporary 3-D computer animation techniques, while retaining a spontaneous sense of rhythm and an artisanal, even amateurish, simplicity. In France, one can stand in front of the comic book section in any bookstore and see hundreds of individual stories and styles. Significantly, Chomet and other French animators pursue similarly auteurist routes in their movies. Thanks to features like *The Triplets of Belleville,* this small national industry is finding a viable niche outside of the norms of both Hollywood and Japanese anime. *The Triplets of Belleville* has proven the most successful export so far from this new breed of animators, many of whom are also funded by Didier Brunner's daring production company, Les Armateurs.

The story in *The Triplets of Belleville* unfolds in episodic form, almost like chapters in a comic book. The title sequence acts as a distinct preview, with a monochrome "performance" by three eccentric women singers, the Triplets of Belleville, belting out their raucous song "Swinging Belleville Rendez-vous," in a setting that recalls Betty Boop cartoons of the 1930s. Not only are the audience members a grotesque gallery of stereotypes, the Triplets are joined on stage by caricatures of entertainers such as Fred Astaire, guitarist Django Reinhardt, and a nearly naked Josephine Baker, whose jungle number turns the little old men in the theater into monkeys. This performance turns out to be a black-and-white television show, watched by our central characters, Mme. Souza and her grandson, Champion. Souza is trying to find some distraction to interest the melancholy boy: she tries the piano, buys him a puppy, and gives him a toy train set, until she discovers his obsession with bicycles. One of the few possessions in his room is a photo of his lost parents with a bike, which seems to motivate his fascination. Once she buys a tricycle, the story leaps ahead a decade, and the remote house is now encroached on by a noisy train trestle. Chomet is able to establish the family's new routine in a few shots: The dog Bruno barks at the commuter trains stopping outside his window, while he waits for the grown Champion to complete his bicycle training under the watchful eyes of Souza, who blows her whistle to set the pace. Once home, she feeds Champion, massages his aching muscles with a vacuum cleaner and lawn mower, and puts him to bed.

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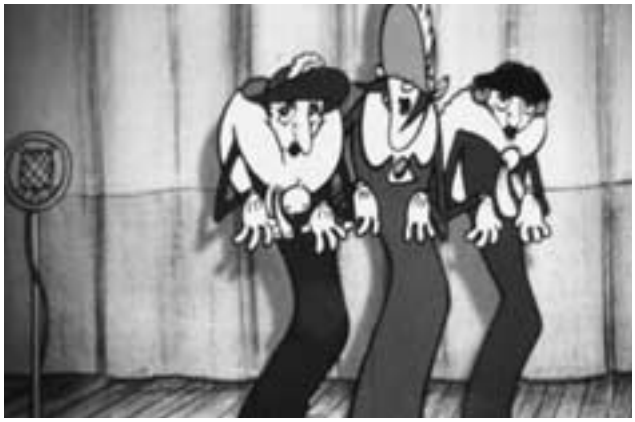

The triplets perform.

For the remaining two-thirds of the movie, we follow Souza, whose actions really motivate the bulk of the plot. She and Bruno ride in a van at the Tour de France, where an athletic Eddy Merckx-type rider leads the race, while Champion falls back among the three losers who give up at the back of the pack. However, a mysterious pair of thugs, who seem to have slipped out of the pages of a 1960s *Mad Magazine,* kidnap the three slowest riders and sail with them from Marseilles in the hold of an impossibly stylized ship. Souza and Bruno pick up the trail and follow them across the ocean, pedaling a paddleboat to Belleville/New York, in one of the most beautiful sequences of the movie, to the accompaniment of Mozart's Mass in C Minor. Chomet's story is in part about transportation; every mode is used, but mechanical means are usually sinister. The best people move on their own power.

In Belleville, a noisy city full of tall buildings and enormous citizens, the poor Souza meets the aging, eccentric singing triplets who take her in along with Bruno, who gets another train to bark at from the window. Eventually, Souza joins their nightclub act, playing the spokes on a bike wheel, and discovers that the French mafia have a bizarre club where they gamble on Champion and the other two captive bike racers, who race in front of projections of French country roads. Aided by the Triplets and their hand grenades, Souza manages to free Champion, destroy most of the French mafia, and escape Belleville, scraping and pedaling up steep streets that lead out of town aboard the bikers' sailboat-like platform. Finally, a brief epilogue reveals an aged Champion back home watching a television that shows the end of the previous scene. The story has come full circle: "It's over, grandma."

Remarkably, this story avoids any generic formulae: The lone boy does not grow up to be a champion, as his name would seem to promise. In the hands of a more commercial producer this might become an "I think I can" success story of how a lonely boy and his quirky grandmother beat the odds, triumphantly winning the Tour de France. In contrast to the unlikely young heroes of *Antz* (Darnell and Johnson, 1998) or *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* (Davis, 2001), Champion is neither clever nor ambitious. Instead, Chomet's Champion receives even less screen time and character development than the dog—at least we get to see Bruno's dreams. The elongated, exhausted Champion remains a cartoonish character, a mute descendant of both Winsor McCay's animated mosquitoes and Jacques Tati's Monsieur Hulot. Champion begins and ends the story dependent upon his grandmother. But it is precisely this refusal to Disney-fy the story into a childish fable that preserves the film's interest. Rather than follow the generic rise of a lonely child into a

Young Champion and his grandmother, Mme. Souza, at home

The house is surrounded by signs of the modern world.

new hero of French bicycling, the movie skips from engaging scene to scene, much like a silent cartoon. As in Felix the Cat, characters simply see a situation and act upon it without reflecting or clarifying any motives. Thus, while the basic plot summary would seem to suggest clear parallels with *Finding Nemo* (Stanton and Unkrich, 2003)—after all, a concerned relative crosses a great distance, making eccentric friends along the way, to rescue a kidnapped child—*The Triplets of Belleville* fails to exploit the generic devices that make Pixar's movie so classical. For instance, Chomet spends a great deal of time on how the aging Triplets catch and eat their frog dinners, but never bothers to communicate the thoughts or feelings of the captured Champion.

Further, *The Triplets of Belleville* populates its world with memorable characters who have only minimal roles in advancing the plot. There is the terrific driver of the van, who chews his cigarette, hunches up, and has to endure the looks and whistle-blasts of Souza's scorn; a paddle-boat operator anxiously awaiting his boat's return; a bloated Belleville boy scout who tries to help a defiant Souza cross the street; and the most ingratiating waiter in the world, attending to the mafioso's table. Every scene has a surprisingly clever minor figure burst forth. This sort of narrative construction owes more to the history of the European art cinema than it does to the history of commercial animation. The story meanders, seasons pass, and the seemingly inconsequential events of watching a passing train rattle the house or listening to the sounds of tadpoles popping like corn in the Triplets' pot gradually preoccupy the viewer.

Chomet's style is equally intriguing. Beyond the backgrounds, which are quite contradictory in their mix of rich detail and cartoonish exaggeration, there are stunning scene transitions that rapidly transform and animate time and space. Among the most accomplished examples are the introduction to Champion as a young man in training, and then the shift to him riding in the Tour de France. The first transition is from the chubby young Champion riding his tricycle, to seasons passing, to a grown Bruno barking at a train. The image zooms in to the photo of Charles de Gaulle on a train passenger's newspaper. The photo becomes animated and De Gaulle announces a national bike race, but the image then zooms out to the home of some anonymous family watching the De Gaulle announcement on their television; the camera then backs out of their window revealing Champion racing by, training in the steep evening streets, followed by Souza on the old tricycle. A wild variety of high and

Champion as a boy

low angles make the rainy streets pulsate across the screen. These elegant blue streets will be recalled in the marvelous waves of the ocean crossing, and again in the cruel blue streets of Belleville. The second significant transition begins later than night, as Bruno goes to sleep and dreams of trains in black-and-white, ending on an extreme close-up of his nose, which shifts to color. A zoom-out reveals the dog basking in sunny Southern France atop the van that follows Champion in the bike race.

Both transitions highlight Chomet's fanciful style and willingness to return to the essence of animation, foregrounding the magical ability to reduce referential objects to a few lines, only to breathe life back into those minimal, abstract sketches. The obvious marks of narration and surprising ellipses in *The Triplets of Belleville* call the spectator's attention to the surface of the image and the narrator's manipulation, and finally challenge the audience to actively perceive and comprehend the time, space, and action.

The film's resulting narrative space follows a clear trajectory from a brief idyllic setting to the increasingly menacing encroachment of buildings and vehicles until reaching a peak with the comical skyscrapers and jammed streets of Belleville, before a return to calm. The first images of Mme. Souza's home offer a comforting, three-story house on a hill, surrounded by a small wall, trees, and birds. The Eiffel Tower is off in the distance. But soon planes fly low overhead, enormous cranes sprout up, and finally, the warm colors and light of the rural setting have given way to dark blues, with a train trestle pushing against the house, and the few remaining trees stripped bare. The old world is losing ground fast. A series of streets and buildings now lead all the way to Paris, so the sudden shift to the bright, open spaces of southern

France for the Tour de France provides a welcome return to a casual place and leisurely pace. The ocean crossing, in pursuit of Champion, provides an operatic transition from the old to new worlds.

Belleville, however, with its looming buildings, noisy streets, gigantic crowds of gigantic people, and green harbor water, becomes the most extremely disorienting space. Its hustle and bustle warn of the ultimate results of urbanization. The newly arrived Mme. Souza must now build a fire under a trestle, much like the one beside her own home. Chomet claims that Belleville is a composite of Toronto, Montreal, and New York. However, only New York has a Statue of Liberty and it is unlikely many Canadians will want to recognize themselves in Belleville. So, his caricatural representation of Belleville, featuring the French Wine Center as a cover for the mafia's captive bike race, does suggest that Belleville/New York is the ultimate villain in modernization and loss of the old ways. On their escape out of town, however, Mme. Souza trips up the Mafioso's car, sending it into an ocean liner's gaping smokestack, where it is belched back up into the night sky to explode in a tri-color, *bleu-blanc-rouge,* fireworks display that turns the sinister Belleville skyline into Disneyland. Champion and his racing sidekick help pedal their bulky machine over the final bridge and out into a countryside close to that of his youth, but the final shot of the film returns the aging Champion to the same room, and seat in front of the television, as in the film's opening. The past is recovered, the new world is evaded, and the visual nostalgia is reinforced.

While *The Triplets of Belleville* looks different from Hollywood and anime, it also sounds quite distinctive. Chomet takes great inspiration from Jacques Tati's cinema, in its romantic rejection of modern life, but also in its emphasis on music and sound effects, and rejection of dialogue. Not only does the movie boast a weather vane in the shape of Tati on a bicycle, it owes much of its pacing and humor to the soundtrack. The opening performance sequence by the Triplets sets the pattern for the film, where the loud, raucous music and monkey shrieks of the audience allow excessive sounds to guide our attention and reinforce the caricatures. Words are only featured as occasional song lyrics or on signs and newspapers; speech has no place in this world. Young Champion signals his delight with his new tricycle with clapping hands, Mme. Souza reveals her despair by clicking her glasses and sighing. The film is as much about the sound of trains tooting, dogs barking, and the aged Triplets slurping down frog soup as it is about a young man kidnapped by gangsters. The ultimate performance by the Triplets and Mme. Souza, in which one sister rattles her newspaper, another plucks the shelves of her refrigerator, the third manipulates the vacuum, and Souza drums on bicycle spokes, proves most illustrative of Chomet's rich soundtrack. The comical and then haunting sound of their music becomes the diegetic soundtrack for the dozing Bruno's latest dream, which combines footage of an archaic train with a harnessed Champion. As the dog awakes in the club, he realizes the scent of Champion is on the mafioso. But, the sudden sound of the gangsters' cocked guns taking aim at Bruno interrupts the musical performance, after which the waiter begins to sob apologetically. The music, composed from sound effects, ends up replaced by a new set of sounds. In contrast to so much mainstream animation, in which the sound obediently follows the action, and the marketing is based on the fame of the actors providing voices to the characters, Chomet's soundtrack, like those of Tati, actively foregrounds its labor and vitality. As in the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Jeunet's *Delicatessen,* the soundtrack here refuses to take a backseat to the images.

The new faces of French animation

Importantly, *The Triplets of Belleville,* like many contemporary French animated features, including *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (Ocelot, 1998), *Children of the Rain* (Leclerc, 2003), and *Raining Cats and Frogs* (Girerd, 2003), combines striking graphic style, based on comic-book aesthetics and reduced depth cues, with some computer assistance. Chomet relied upon small teams of computer animators for detailed models of demanding images such as bicycle spokes and automobiles, but also ocean waves and smoke from the steamships. However, often the crisp 3-D images were then reworked to reduce their precision, and

blend in better with the hand-drawn 2-D figures and backgrounds. The result is a seamless synthesis that refuses to follow the industry norms for 3-D, which typically impose a hyper-realistic Pixar style devoted to mirroring live action. Instead, Chomet's style, just like his storytelling, remains distinctly personal and refreshingly spontaneous. The renaissance in French animation is not a unified school, but rather a cluster of intensely auteurist animators struggling to define a space within the international animation industry, and much of this vitality it owes to Didier Brunner, Sylvain Chomet, and *The Triplets of Belleville*.

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Abstract *The Triplets of Belleville* (Sylvain Chomet, 2003) is an important example of French animation today. This tale of a grandmother raising, then rescuing, her young ward moves at a delirious pace. Its rich characterizations, visuals, and soundtrack produce a surreal and nostalgic world, far from Disney.

Kinsey

Director/writer: Bill Condon. Producer: Gail Mutrux. Cinematographer: Frederick Elmes. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Bio-pics can be tediously middle-brow affairs. Not only do they simplify lives rather than probe their complexity and contradiction, they also can have a sanctimonious, teacherly attitude, implicitly telling us, "This story is true, and it will be good for you." The ones that work best are those about entertainers, because even if the life doesn't have a fabulous dramatic arc, at least there is the music of Ray Charles or Buddy Holly. So I would never have thought that anyone, not even Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters* [1998]), could make a great bio-pic out of the life of Alfred Kinsey—a documentary perhaps, but not a big, entertaining, life-affirming movie about our first Professor of Sex. I especially would not have expected this achievement on the tail of a national election that purported to return us to the sorts of "moral values" that a figure like Kinsey has often been credited—justly or not—with undermining.

When Condon submitted his film to the Ratings Board with some trepidation that it would receive the dreaded NC-17, he was pleased to learn that the board not only gave him a much more marketable R but that they wrote back a nice note: "Thank you, we learned a lot." And learn we do with this film, but not through the tedious piety of other bio-pics. The life of the first American teacher and researcher to bring the facts and mechanics of human sexual behavior into the classroom, and from there into the living room, offers a surprising number of lessons.

Considering Hollywood's atrocious track record in depicting the lives of professors—who has ever seen a teacher really teach a class in a film, as opposed to making plot points that quickly advance the narrative?—this film is an astonishing achievement. A life that is driven by sex converges with research and teaching that are too. Indeed, the classroom proves essential as the first public crucible: long before Kinsey and his team of researchers wrote the two famous "reports," *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), Kinsey taught his students what he knew and asked what they knew, taking his first sexual histories from them.

The film shows us how an irresponsibly moralistic sex pedagogy is replaced by Kinsey's more honest confrontation with sexual ignorance. The 1930s hygiene course offered by Professor of Medicine Thurman Rice (villainously played, in an ironic turn, by Tim Curry) screens a 16mm "White Coater"—essentially a sex exploitation film designed to scare the pants off kids by portraying the horrors of VD. In this small, men-only class Rice then warns of the evils of masturbation. When Kinsey (played by Liam Neeson) finally gets his chance to offer a better, franker, "Marriage Course" to a large, gender-mixed class of seniors, married students, and some faculty, he fairly bursts into the lecture hall in his eagerness to confront students with their object of study: a slide of an erect penis touching an engorged vagina. He details the stages of human and mammalian sex: stimulation, lubrication, erection, orgasm, release. Kinsey is portrayed as an enthusiastic, relentless teacher who quickly enlists students, as he enlists everyone, in his ever-enlarging project of collecting everyone's sexual history.

But Kinsey is not sanctified as a kindly Mr. Chips of sex. He is far from a perfect teacher. He is overbearing, quick to shift into stentorian tones, and later

Photofest

Alfred Kinsey (Liam Neeson) takes the sexual history of an older woman (Lynn Redgrave).

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in his life this relentless lecturing does him in as he unsuccessfully hectors his Rockefeller funders and other donors shocked by his results. His real talent is as an interviewer: he perfects his interview techniques and really listens to what his students, and a widening group of informants, have to tell him about their sex lives. We listen avidly to the at times painful confessions and, increasingly, to the pathos of the informants who often find comfort in telling their stories to Dr. Kinsey, especially the repressed homosexuals. The film vividly portrays the passions and the tedium of sex research and the political maneuvering necessary to pioneer the field, as well as the boredom and intrigues of small-town academic life.

Kinsey begins with a black-and-white interview that exactly inverts the hook of the previews. Instead of the probing Kinsey, notebook in hand, facing the camera to conduct an interview, it is Kinsey himself who is interviewed, first by his young associate, Clyde Martin (cannily played by Peter Saarsgard). Martin looks directly into the camera and asks Kinsey about his sexual history. Kinsey simultaneously answers the questions and coaches his colleagues—first Martin, then Wardell Pomeroy (Chris O'Donnell) and Paul Gebhard (Timothy Hutton)— on how to put the interview subject at ease and ask the right questions: not "Did you ever masturbate," but "When did you first masturbate?" When Pomeroy asks about his childhood and Kinsey tells him about his many childhood illnesses, he points out that Pomeroy's uncomfortable body language signals his discomfort to the interview subject. When Paul Gebhard asks him when he first began to "pleasure himself," Kinsey advises the use of the more direct word: masturbation.

Kinsey turns the apparatus of his non-judgmental interview technique on himself in order to teach his associates how to get the truth of his subjects' sexual secrets in face-to-face confession. Through this highly personal technique—never a mere questionnaire—Kinsey established bonds of trust that permitted him to discover the existence of far greater varieties of sexual practices than had ever been imagined. No questionnaire had ever elicited such truthful answers. The film uses this same technique to draw its audience into the drama. We ourselves are questioned along with Kinsey and, through these questions, we get used to a sympathetic "speaking sex" that, for Kinsey, will turn into a somewhat more prurient "watching sex" as the film goes on.

Kinsey's own sex history, begun in the opening interview, is the device that structures the entire film. The initial black-and-white interviews lead to extended color flashbacks of his youth, courtship, marriage, and beyond. We see Kinsey's fundamentalist father railing against the invention of the zipper, the young Alfred counseling a fellow boy scout to put his testicles in cold water to deter masturbation. In the very next scene, however, we see young Kinsey, full of self-loathing, furiously masturbating in his tent. It is just such hypocrisy that Kinsey will eventually expose. The interview and flashbacks also tell us of Kinsey and his wife's difficult honeymoon. A sexually inexperienced, and, it is implied, well-endowed Kinsey cannot penetrate what turns out to have been his wife's overly thick hymen. Science and surgery come to the rescue as a visit to a gynecologist corrects the problem. In the very next scene Kinsey and wife "Mac" (Laura Linney, perfectly mid-western, just a little dowdy, but sexually game) go at it doggie-style and fall to the floor in exhausted satisfaction.

Along with Kinsey, talking head after talking head confesses the most intimate secrets of sex. In one clever bit, a man with a thick accent confesses that he has had sex with "whores." But Kinsey's associate, thinking he said "horse," is surprised to learn that he had sex with them too. The film makes clear that only non-judgmental questioning can elicit these secrets. At one point, when Kinsey is at the height of his career, the extent of his research is indicated graphically by a map of the United States crisscrossed by red lines indicating the travels of the research team. Talking heads pop in and out of every state, each telling a different sexual story. As heads accumulate and voices merge, the collective portrait vividly illustrates Kinsey's point that there is no such thing as abnormality, only dizzying variety. The map, used several times to illustrate the tireless nature of Kinsey's research, offers a wonderfully diverse counter to the deceptively binary division between red and blue states of our recent cartological imagination.

About halfway through the film, Kinsey and associate Clyde Martin visit a gay bar in Chicago. The scene introduces Kinsey's discovery of the magnitude of homosexual experience and the existence of homosexual subcultures. Up until this point, we have seen Kinsey the zoologist fascinated by the taxonomy of gall wasps, catching on to the world's enormous ignorance and hypocrisy about human sexual behavior. In this first part of the film, sex seems to intrude into his life almost against his will. His response is that of a scientist at war with sheer ignorance: misconceptions about sex cause enormous suffering and inhibit plea-

sure. Knowledge will set it right. Kinsey's marriage course begins as a place of advocacy for heterosexual couples who need a modicum of sexual knowledge to be good partners. Using the method of Kinsey's own sexual history, the film has inculcated in its audience a non-judgmental curiosity in the interest of scientific knowledge.

In the scene in the gay bar, however, something changes in Kinsey's relation to sex research and sex practice. At first Kinsey is his usual blunt pest, asking a million questions, raising eyebrows, but ultimately, through persistence and sympathy, extracting the histories he needs to document yet another variety of sexual practice. The very first people he accosts are taken aback by his intrusive questions and one of them counters with a dare: "If you really want to know, why don't you stick around and watch?" By "watch," the man may mean just, "watch our bar subculture," or he may mean "watch us have sex." Either way, he challenges Kinsey to get closer, close enough to know who they really are. Here, in a nutshell, is the dilemma explored in the second half of the film: How close does one get to the object of observation before one loses one's ability to be a scientist? Yet if one cannot get close at all, what is there to observe?

At this point Kinsey does not "stay and watch." But we do get a glimmer in this bar—many years before Stonewall—of a group of people practicing their sexuality as something that *could* be watched. And we also get a sense, in the following scene, that it is these sexual practices that affect Kinsey personally as well as scientifically. Kinsey and Clyde Martin, his associate, room together in a Chicago hotel room. Martin appears casually in the nude before, and after, a shower. They discuss Kinsey's heterosexual-to-homosexual continuum and where they would locate themselves at this point in their lives on this scale (both agree they are in the middle, "threes" on a scale of one to six). Soon, however, Martin kisses Kinsey and the two men embrace hard. No more is shown than hungry groping before cutting to the very next scene of Kinsey's wife, Mac, in tears after he has told her of his experience.

Much of the rest of the film dramatizes the fine line Kinsey and his research team walk between objective research and personal sexual involvement. At this stage in most bio-pics we would suffer through the contrition of the good-hearted hero who loves his wife but cannot help but cause her pain with his philandering (see *Ray*). *Kinsey*, however, does not follow this pattern; his life work *is* learning about sex and thus, in a sense *is* philandering—what he learns here about his homosexual pleasures (he would have called them "outlets") *is* part of his research. His marriage is not wrecked. Nor does his long-suffering wife suffer for long. Soon after, over rhubarb pie in an Indiana kitchen, Mac confesses to Clyde Martin that his affair with her husband has livened up their own marital sex life, which had become habitual. Martin in turn confesses that he prefers women and proposes an affair with Mac, to which Kinsey, after only a moment's hesitation, assents. Laura Linney's shy, unassuming and yet forthright way of accepting Martin's offer ("Why I think I'd like that!") perfectly captures the very essence of the Kinsey mix of middle-class normality and game experimentation.

The laudable complexity of the film is to show that sexual "liberation" can be an enlightenment that brings genuine joy and can also be a painful source of conflict. We soon see a rejuvenated Mac and Clyde Martin giggling in bed after a tryst as Kinsey, ever the taskmaster, calls them both back to work. Sexual experimentation is expected of the Kinsey crew of colleagues who, along with their wives—Martin will soon marry—were caught up in this sexual revolution *avant la lettre*. This ultimately is the deep interest of Condon's film: watching a fairly ordinary group of midwestern academics at family dinners, picnics, and musical gatherings talking sex, studying sex, and, eventually, having sex in various configurations throughout the 1940s and into the early 50s. Yet neither does the film avoid the emotional dangers of these experiments. Later, when Clyde Martin and Paul Gebhard have affairs with one another's wives, one end of the casual affair turns serious and Martin and Gebhard end up in a wrestling match among the file cabinets. Kinsey, who seems to have had an easier time compartmentalizing these affairs, rails at them. They rail back at him for treating them like lab rats. Kinsey *was* playing with fire in these experiments. But, as Martin notes, he had the emotional discipline to handle it while some of the others did not.

For many years, even after his death in 1956, the interpenetration of Kinsey's and his colleagues' own sex lives with that of their research was not known. To most, he was the respectable Indiana University professor who happened to study sex with the same gusto he had once brought to gall wasps. Only gradually did it begin to come out that Kinsey's sexual experimentation extended to what T.C. Boyle (in his current fictionalization of Kinsey's life) calls "the inner circle" of close colleagues. Only gradually also did it become known the extent to which Kinsey, as the man in the gay bar had put it, really did systematically "stick

Photofest

The triangle of Kinsey (center), his assistant Clyde Martin (Peter Sarsgaard), and his wife, Mac (Laura Linney)

around and watch." In the horrified words of Kinsey's Rockefeller sponsor spoken in the film: "It has been said that you have taken to observing women in a heightened state of arousal." This sponsor did not know the half of it.

Initially Kinsey had spied on prostitutes with clients and, later, homosexuals having sex in the bathrooms at Penn Station. But since prostitutes faked orgasms and illicit sex acts were hard to catch and study on the fly, he sought other subjects. In 1949, after publication of the male volume, he set up a sort of laboratory in the attic of his own home for the observation of sexual behavior in action, as well as the filming of that behavior. He often enlisted himself and his associates in a wide range of sex acts with other volunteers, called "Friends of the Research." Heterosexual, homosexual, and sadomasochistic sex acts were performed in this attic for Kinsey's cameras. At one point the film shows Mac changing the sheets. At another point we glimpse her, Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin all having sex in a wide variety of briefly glimpsed acts in grainy 16mm black-and-white films. A 60-year-old woman, famous for the rapidity and fluidity of her orgasms, is introduced and then shown having sex with Pomeroy for the cameras. Later, the staff analyzes her reactions on the film.

Watching sex thus merges, for Kinsey and many of his associates, with having sex—all different kinds of it. Toward the end, an exhausted and defeated Kinsey, spurned by the Rockefeller Foundation after the publication of the 1953 volume on female sexual behavior, is found by Mac in the bathroom of his home, bleeding from having intentionally punctured his foreskin: "I wanted to understand different sensations; it didn't hurt much, but it didn't give much pleasure either." Career failure is portrayed as sexual failure. Mac tells Kinsey to "stop punishing" himself, suggesting that he is acting out his failure to continue his research on his own body, in a throwback to the puritanical self-punishment of his fire-and-brimstone father who we learn, when Kinsey takes *his* history, was forced to wear a halter as a child to prevent masturbatory "self-abuse."

For some, Kinsey's sexual proclivities and practice of what might be called participant observation disqualified him as a scientist and made him complicit with criminals.[1] For others, this made the science possible in the first place. His first major biographer, James Jones (1997), who pictures Kinsey on the cover of his fat book as a dour, unsmiling figure, argues that from the very beginning Kinsey was a masochistic, homosexual voyeur dissimulating normality but possessed entirely by his demons. His real motivation for all his research, Jones argues, was to see if others were like him—hence the charge that he exaggerated the numbers on homosexuality. At its most inflammatory, Jones asserts that Kinsey's real interest was pure prurience, not science. Kinsey's other recent biographer, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy (1998), pictures a more smiling, pleasant figure on the cover of his almost-as-fat book. Gathorne-Hardy does not deny that Kinsey had homosexual encounters, nor that he engaged in some masochistic acts, nor that he liked to watch. But he refutes the idea that Kinsey was a life-long homosexual-masochist-voyeur, especially in the pathologizing, fixed ways that Jones uses those terms. He asserts, rather, that Kinsey was a bisexual who fluctuated on his own scale, but whose interest in diverse sexual practices is what enabled him to extract histories from homosexuals and other minority sexualities in the first place.

Condon's film shrewdly navigates between these two views of Alfred Kinsey—offering a brave, caring crusader but also a driven man who burned himself out, going too far too fast. Though it never glosses over the facts of Kinsey's homosexual, masochistic, and voyeuristic practices, it refuses to see Kinsey as essentially pathological. In an early scene, the film shows Kinsey leaning perhaps a little too close to a fellow boy scout just before they pray together to save their souls from the evils of masturbation, suggesting a soupçon of early homosexual desire. Later, the film softens our impression of any original homosexuality by portraying Kinsey as the object of Clyde Martin's homosexual initiative. This is Condon's poetic license: both biographies agree that it was the more experienced Kinsey who initiated relations with the younger Martin, and Martin who then, as the film does show, initiated relations with Kinsey's wife —though probably as a way to loosen himself from a relationship that was too overbearing. Kinsey did have a crush on Martin, but the fact that he could accept this new state of affairs without an overt display of jealousy, as both biographers and the film show, is a tribute to his ability to keep desire and love, sexual experimentation and marriage, in some sort of balance.

As for the film's own component of "watching sex," the question of whether the film is itself fascinated with watching sex: not very much. No heterosexual sex acts are shown in any great duration and except for kisses, no homosexual sex acts are shown at all. Kinsey's masochistic piercing of his foreskin is alluded to "tastefully" by only a few drops of blood. In the end, Condon's film sacrifices its own potential sexiness for the forward momentum of Kinsey's life and research, never dwelling on any particular scene, never drawing us into anything but the talk of sex. Its R rating, as we have seen, is its reward. One might have wished for a slightly braver film on this score, but it is not easy to reconcile Hollywood uplift with graphic depictions of wide varieties of sexual practices. Kinsey's own sex-watching thus far exceeds what the film gives us to see, even of the simulated variety.

Kinsey could have been a tougher, harder-hitting, less feel-good film. It could have chosen to end with Kinsey's defeat and death (the actual trajectory of his life) instead of an inspiring scene of Mac and Prok (Kinsey's nickname) among the redwoods. But even in this scene Kinsey's impatience to get on with work and Mac's desire to linger suggest the whole pattern of their lives. Liam Neeson's portrayal of Kinsey strikes just the right note of compassion and compulsion, balancing the sexually repressed boy with the sexually experimental man. And Laura Linney magically makes an extremely passive supporting role endlessly interesting. Oliver Platt's brilliant portrait of Kinsey's genial boss—Indiana University President Herman Wells—adds to what is a rich portrait of the academy. That Kinsey was able to conduct his research on human sexuality at a conservative midwestern university is partly due to the administrative brilliance of this jovial, astute man.

Condon's film asks if prurience and science can coexist. The implicit answer resides in the undeniable mixture of pleasure and knowledge given by the film. For in our highly mediated culture of sex, pioneered by Dr. Kinsey, where sexual behavior is obsessively talked about and on view in so many different ways, we have all become Kinseys, observers who demonstrate the simultaneity of prurience and scientific detachment. We watch sex, even in this R-rated movie, with a mixture of both.

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Note

1. Dr. Judith Reisman, leader of a group called Restoring Social Virtue and Purity to America, has particularly targeted Kinsey as the cause of a pro-sex agenda that has, as one of her books puts it, been "Crafting 'Gay' Children." These claims give Kinsey an awful lot of credit—as if one man could cause a sexual revolution, let alone an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. Reisman's claim that Kinsey based a portion of his research upon a sexually voracious pedophile blames Kinsey for acts committed and entered in a diary long before Kinsey began research. To be sure, Kinsey did not prosecute this man but to do so would have been to violate the confidentiality required to conduct his research. There is no question that Kinsey was a crusader for frank sexual education and birth control, for decriminalization of many sex crimes, and for the recognition of wide variations of sexual behavior (he abhorred the term abnormal), but contemporary attempts to vilify his research because he used the information recorded throughout the life of a pedophile make no sense.

Abstract Bio-pics can be tediously middle-brow affairs that simplify lives rather than probe complexity and contradiction, but Bill Condon's *Kinsey* is a great exception. Structured around the taking of a sex history—Kinsey's own—this film explores the convergence of teaching, research, and a life all driven by sex. Condon's film navigates shrewdly between Kinsey as the brave crusader and Kinsey as the man with his own sexual demons.

Photofest

The dying Rémy, with his family and friends

The Barbarian Invasions (Les Invasions barbares)

Director: Denys Arcand. Producers: Daniel Louis and Denise Robert. Writer: Arcand. Cinematography: Guy Dufaux. Astral Films.

The wonder of Denys Arcand's film, *The Barbarian Invasions,* is that although a dying man is at the center of all the action, a sense of joy permeates the film. The joy emanates from two words, one spoken about halfway through the film, and the other, almost at the end. The power of these words is such that they set up a playground for their dissemination that dances through a world of fun, irony, and the ambiguity of moral dilemmas. The first of these words is "mystery," spoken by the nursing nun to the dying man, Rémy, as he leaves her floor for a private room, and "miracle," spoken by his daughter, Sylvaine, near the end of the film via laptop computer. The fact that the actor who speaks the phrase, "Embrace the mystery," played the role of one of the apostles in Arcand's 1989 film, *Jesus of Montreal,* marks the importance of her words, which bear the trace of the mystery of the earlier film—a mystery that transformed the lives of the men and women who lived their lives as actors into the lives of the apostles of the young actor who became the suffering Jesus of the St. Henri Subway Station. The nun knows what we do not, yet knows not what she knows. The young daughter, Sylvaine, is also aware of this mystery, but from her perception this mystery is a miracle that has everything to do with having a "lust for life" that she inherited from her dying father. A search for how Arcand allows these traces from *Jesus of Montreal* to play with this highly sophisticated, urbane, intellectual, humorous film—traces that come to us from the lives of the characters who transcend their world toward the mystery of the Passion on the Mountain—is the purpose of this essay.

Irony soon becomes apparent, since *The Barbarian Invasions,* a film that centers upon Rémy, a self-proclaimed socialist, sensualist, and lover of women, seems a strange recipient of this trace from the earlier film. But the irony is lessened if we take into account two things: (1) *Jesus of Montreal* can be analyzed as an astute interpretation of the theory and praxis of Liberation Theology, which was quite popular in intellectual groups in Montreal at the time of the making of the film.[1] Liberation theology emphasizes the structures of this world, and is suffused with socialist

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thinking; (2) the faith expressed in *Jesus of Montreal* has what all faith must have in order to be faith rather than certainty: a sense of doubt. A group of pious sayings is certainly not what *Jesus of Montreal* is about.

Attempting to understand the sense of mystery that the nursing nun mentions is a worthy undertaking, as long as we know that in the end the mystery must remain, must continue its dissemination of the movement of play. If it does not, then what has been thought about, studied, is not a mystery, but instead simply a sophisticated puzzle. Mystery, like Negative Theology, always demands that the mind move beyond thought, desire, understanding, toward a space, an abyss, that beckons, challenges, but never discloses. Negative Theology is not Liberation Theology, but it is possible to say that Denys Arcand's particular expression of Liberation Theology is touched by the former. That is, in Liberation Theology, God, to a certain extent, can be understood through a relationship with Jesus; in Negative Theology, a sense of God is much further removed. God is beyond our sense of being, beyond even our sense of God, and between the two is a deep abyss that reverberates with doubt. It is this form of sensibility that Jacques Derrida says touches all the literature that he respects. It is this sensibility that plays with our sense of truth.

How to approach the mystery within Arcand's *The Barbarian Invasions*? Rémy is alone in his hospital room. Or rather, he is not alone, but is in the presence of complete strangers from other cultures. His room is not private. The sight of a man dying of cancer before his time in a sort of isolation is tragic. But his ex-wife telephones their son in London, England. She tells him to come home to see his dying father. The son is very reluctant, since he claims to have no relationship with his father anymore. As his father will later state: he, Rémy, is a "sensualist socialist," while his son, Sébastien, is a "puritanical capitalist." But Sébastien relents, and consequently, the story begins.

Why does Sébastien relent? The mystery begins as it plays with the alienated son. Obeying his mother's wishes, he assembles all his father's friends around him, so that his father will die among friends, rather than strangers. This is in itself a nice story, a story of human sympathy and compassion, but if this were also the end of the story then it would not have the powerful impact that it does. The trajectory of the film that takes us toward this power is, of course, the one that takes us toward, but not to, the mystery.

This nice story, always mixed with Arcandian satirical humor, now begins a playful dance with scandal. The playground becomes more intriguing. It involves the breaking of the law in three different instances: First, Sébastien bribes, with an outrageously huge sum of money, one of the unionized hospital employees, from the union in charge of hospital upkeep. Sébastien asks the union to beautifully decorate a room on an unused floor of the hospital so that his father can have a private room where his friends can surround him and have the kind of verbal intellectual adventures they once had in their youths. Second, Sébastien contacts the daughter, a heroin addict, of one of his father's old lovers in order to secure a constant supply of heroin that will allow his father to die in peace, rather than in pain. Third, Sébastien, with the discreet help of a hospital nurse, allows his father, who can no longer eat or drink, to be given the fatal intravenous drip that will secure him lasting peace from pain. In other words, Arcand's film depicts bribery, the purchase of illegal drugs, and euthanasia, all actions that violate the law, to depict the manner in which a hostile, indifferent son is transformed into a loving son. Yes, this is part of the trajectory toward mystery. John Caputo, the American Derridean philosopher, tells us that an "absolute incommensurability of the individual exists vis-à-vis the general."[2] This means that whoever realizes this incommensurability realizes the necessity of transcending the law. Dangerous idea? Yes. But then dying is dangerous.

Besides legal scandal, Arcand also introduces into our playground another form of scandal on the road toward mystery: social scandal. Two of Rémy's important mistresses from his past are always present, at the request of his also present ex-wife who divorced him because of one of the affairs. What is doubly remarkable is that everyone leaves behind old jealousies and misery in order to focus upon Rémy so that he can leave this life with some form of happiness. Thus, Arcand implies that if we "walk the straight and narrow," the humorless, unplayful path that society tells us we must follow in order to be good citizens, we will probably never progress toward the mystery. Our lives will always remain a bit dull, weary, bland, and probably selfish. Mystery and miracle do not dwell within these sorts of lives.

Arcand, deeply aware of ambiguity, of the manner in which life disseminates in many directions just after it has seemingly been well defined, includes "barbarian invasions" within his trajectory toward

mystery. Three very different sorts of invasions seem to be implied: that of the suicide pilots who brought horror to New York on September 11; that of drug dealers, many of whom, according to Sébastien, are persons who have come from other countries; and that of the super-rich capitalists, such as his son. At the very end of the film Rémy refers to Sébastien as "their prince," meaning the prince of the barbarians. Sébastien, the barbarian capitalist, is permeated by ambiguity. He bribes, buys illegal drugs, and "kills" his father. But also, as we shall ultimately see, he brings joy to his father in his last moments. Sébastien is, to explain him through an historical analogy, perhaps a Goth entering Rome. At first he can be seen as a symbol of everything that is destroying his socialist father, just as the Goths have been seen as the destroyers of Rome. But eventually, the Goths became Romans, were "civilized." Sébastien becomes more and more part of his father's life, becomes more and more human, and, at the end of the film as we see his plane taking off for London, he looks out the window in a manner that suggests he has been changed. The playground has softened him, made him open toward the other. The future, Sébastien, entered his father's life, the past, and is changed. Thus, the trajectory toward mystery is not a children's Bible-tale filled with what everyone would call "good" things. Instead, the way is fraught with questions that cannot be answered, even with horrors that extend beyond understanding.

Looking again at the trace of *Jesus of Montreal* that permeates the film, we see irony once more interweave itself with the ambiguity that moves through the abyssal aspects of the playground of mystery. Rémy Girard, who plays Rémy in this film, also played one of the apostles who lost faith in the God of Jesus. It is as if he, along with most of the other apostles, lost faith when he lost Jesus through crucifixion. Only Mary Magdalene, also an apostle in the film, remained faithful. This trace of doubt totally permeates Rémy in *The Barbarian Invasions,* to the point that he loses faith in the only faith that he has: socialism. He rants that socialist values, including faith in Medicare, are lost, but we suspect that he has also lost faith in his political vision of the world. Thus, strangely, a loss of faith, no matter what sort of faith, is perhaps necessary on this journey toward mystery. Again, the sense of some form of Negative Theology appears. Is Arcand saying that any form of faith that we have, at least any clearly defined form of faith, is an aporia that blocks our path?

Rémy's doubt embraces the entirety of human history. He speaks of "the history of mankind [being] a history of horrors," as the sympathetic nun stands before him in deep sadness. He lists the horrors of human carnage: September 11, the American Civil War, all the wars in recent memory. The list is a litany of suffering. This sense of doubt then becomes more narrowly politically and intellectually defined as he and his friends, in a very witty manner, list all the faiths that they have embraced and then lost: separatism and its many euphemisms—independentistism, Marxism, Marxist-Leninism, Maoism, structuralism, deconstructionism. Earlier, in the presence of the nun, Rémy shouted and ranted at the Roman Catholic Church for having remained silent as Primo Levi was sent to Auschwitz. This extraordinary Italian Jewish, anti-fascist chemist survived, but Rémy does not forgive the Church's silence.

At the beginning of the film Sébastien is filled with a form of doubt that will seem difficult to overcome: faith in his relationship as a son to his father. Nathalie, the young addict who procures heroin for Sébastien so that he can save his father from suffering, has lost faith in life. After Nathalie has given the heroin to Rémy and they develop a quiet relationship, he says to her that she doesn't seem to care much about life and she implies agreement when she calmly says that she won't live long: the space between the overdoses is narrowing. He implies that he loves life, that it grows on one with age. In fact, he says that he, "loved living, books, wine, music," and above all, women. But Nathalie says that he loves the past, not the present, and his reaction signifies agreement. Thus, Rémy has also lost faith in life. He feels a failure in everything. She responds that his son is not a failure and implies that maybe Rémy has something to do with his success.

Nathalie's response is an example, one of the many that Arcand gives us during the film, of the signposts that can be seen on the journey toward the mystery. As mentioned previously, the path of the disseminating play of words and images has many abysses that could lead toward despair, but some of the way is filled with spaces of positive questioning, of a glimpse of hope, and sometimes even a peaceful sense of wonder. For example, on the way home in the van that transports Sébastien and Rémy to Vermont for a PET scan, they stop at a lake surrounded by beautiful autumn trees. Rémy, meditating at the end of the dock in his wheel chair, turns and looks at his son in a manner that suggests a search for a renewed

relationship, and that the furious words they first shouted at each other in the hospital had not destroyed everything.

The journey toward mystery intensifies in its "destructuring fracture[ing]"[3] when three students of Rémy's appear in his hospital room, speaking awkward, but kind words. Standing in the hallway as they leave, Sébastien offers all of them the money that he has obviously promised them for agreeing to come. The two young men accept, but the young woman declines and walks away, in a mood that denotes a pronounced change from her previous attitude. Once again the trace of *Jesus of Montreal* appears as the viewer is reminded of the Mary Magdalene character who walks away from the sweet-talking capitalist who wants them, in a sense, to sell the story of Jesus. Arcand's playful handling of this scene produces the ambiguity: the bribe probably increases the decadence of the male students, but transforms the young female student into the most pure of the *Jesus of Montreal* apostles.

As Rémy travels in the van once more, this time to his old friend's country home at the lake where he had stopped with his son, he says to Nathalie that he "searches . . . is searching for meaning," a seemingly necessary ingredient for those who travel toward mystery. It is at the country home where all his friends, former lovers, and ex-wife gather that this search gathers momentum. While one of his friends dishes out the lovely meal, he speaks of the famous societies/communities in history that have exhibited great intelligence: that of ancient Athens, that of the 13 American colonies at the end of the eighteenth century, and another speaks of that of the great Italian Renaissance. He is developing the "new theory," as one of the women says, that intelligence is a collective thing. This echoes what is said by Sébastien's fiancée, as she speaks to the priest (also the priest in *Jesus of Montreal*) about a warehouse of religious art. She says that they express a collective memory of a people, while he understands her to say that they are worthless. Arcand once more presents a destructuring fracture: Is the art worthwhile because it expresses a collective memory, or is it worthless because each piece may not stand alone? One of the basic factors within socialism is reappearing here, in spite of Rémy's loss of faith in socialism. Arcand plays with Rémy's decaying socialist principles, but what is interesting is that it is not exactly the clearly defined faith of before.

In the final major scene in the film, Rémy, in almost hushed tones, says to Sébastien, "Je t'aime," and that he wishes that Sébastien might have as fine a son as he has. A few moments later it is obvious when a nurse from the hospital arrives with an intravenous

Photofest

Rémy (Rémy Girard) with his son Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)

apparatus that Rémy has chosen euthanasia for himself. In these last moments Rémy says to everyone that, "sharing this modest life with you was a delight." Then everyone says goodbye in their own quiet manner and Nathalie, who is now a reforming heroin addict, says that it was a privilege to know him. Rémy's ex-wife tells him that he is the man of her life. In one of the next moments the second most important word appears in this film. Sébastien brings a laptop to Rémy where he sees the weeping face of his daughter, Sylvaine, bidding goodbye to "mon daddy" and saying that he and her mother had raised two strong children who had a lust for life, and that this was a "miracle."

After Rémy's peaceful death among his friends and family, Sébastien takes Nathalie to his father's house, which is now hers. Books line the walls of his library. One of them is entitled *History and Utopia*. The camera lingers upon this title. Nathalie suddenly gives Sébastien a passionate kiss, but then, just as quickly, pushes him away. When she first met him, she said that she could not be trusted. The drug dealer had said the same. But she has changed. She can be trusted. The very last scene is of Sébastien and his fiancée flying back to London. He looks sadly and longingly out the window. She, who had earlier told Rémy that she really did not believe in love, tells Sébastien that she loves him. At this point, it seems that all of the characters have been touched, by something—perhaps mystery?

Whatever this mystery is that must be embraced in order for Rémy, and the others, to be saved is not, can never be, clear. But what the viewer can perhaps learn is that this mystery has something to do with miracle, the miracle of radical transformation. This transformation could allow the characters to fracture old faiths that blinded them from seeing a "history" that might have the possibility of being a utopia, rather than a site of horror. But to stop at this point is to lose the trace of *Jesus of Montreal*. The breaking of the old faiths necessitates the giving up of old visions of the world as it could be, or of the world beyond. These old faiths are simply moldering in an old warehouse. The next step is to go back to the inspiration for *Jesus of Montreal,* to the Marcan Gospel that ends with an empty tomb, implying that faith in the Jesus of Nazareth involves an embracing of the mystery. To do this involves a letting-go so radical that the destructuring fracture of all that binds our minds allows us to move toward that great space between this world, this history, and whatever it is that lies within the abyss of the Negative Theology that beckons us beyond vision, beyond being, toward the mystery. This letting go involves, as Derrida would say, "the 'yes,' insofar as it is the condition of all promises or of all hope, of all awaiting, of all performativity, of all promises, or of all opening toward the future."[4]

The force of dissemination, the playful force of Arcand's art, moves along a trajectory where dangerous elements mingle with the power of caring, tender love. Through this contradictory, ambivalent world, the film travels toward the mystery that can never be reached, but whose consequence changes all lives that are touched. Even Rémy's gloomy sense of history is transformed into a history with the possibility of promise. The play of the words and action of the film presents a moving truth, a truth that dances before us, that never sermonizes or declares. This play then brings us to the realization that the movement from the word "mystery" to the word "miracle" reveals, without revealing, the truth of play that is the very movement of a human life.

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Notes

1. Liberation Theology, which arose from the barrios of northeast Brazil in the late 1960s, became a powerful force among the Francophone intelligentsia in Quebec in the 1970s and 1980s. See Gregory Baum, *The Church in Quebec* (Ottawa: Novalis, St. Paul University Press, 1991), Chapter 3.
2. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Tears* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 202.
3. Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot, *The Instant of My Death; Demeure, Fiction and Testimony,* trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 91.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 68.

Abstract *The Barbarian Invasions* presents a gigantic virtual playground in the real world of a dying man: a ring of former lovers, gay friends, a heroin-addicted young woman, an alienated son, all brought together by an ex-wife—this is the scene of Denys Arcand's film. Then there occurs the miracle of transformation that moves beyond a truth no one can understand. The only alternative is to embrace the mystery.

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Naomi Watts and Sean Penn follow crossing paths in *21 Grams*.

21 Grams

Director: Alejandro González Iñárritu. Producers: Iñárritu and Robert Salerno. Writer: Guiellermo Arriaga. Cinematographer: Rodrigo Prieto. Focus Features.

The distinctiveness of *21 Grams* lies in an unusually thorough integration of technique with theme, a process that enables its fragmented, disjunctive method to become eloquently expressive. The strategies it uses are not novel in themselves—fractured narratives and experiments with time have a long history in cinema, and non-linear devices (flashes forward and back, repetitive loops, simultaneities) turn up often in films of quite diverse genres. But *21 Grams* brings these methods to bear on its material with remarkable insistence and rigor, and in so doing, it shapes them into a fluent medium for pursuing ideas about identity and time, and questions about destiny and fate.

The film is passionate not only in manner, but in matter. While it deploys its experimental strategies relentlessly, almost obsessively, it attacks its themes with an equally pressing urgency, and a ruthless spirit of inquiry, rejecting the usual explanations and remedies for the tragic predicaments of its characters. The film is not without hope, but its suffering souls are denied aid and comfort from those sources (personal, social, or institutional) we normally turn to in hours of need. Moreover, the film suggests that our search for explanations (above all, for an answer to the question "Why me?") may be fruitless. In its severity and largely unrelieved bleakness, *21 Grams* is reminiscent of the devastated world-views of *Oedipus Rex* and *King Lear*—formidable comparisons, undoubtedly, but not inappropriate for a film that aspires, despite its melodramatic materials, to the austere realm of tragedy.

Critical responses to *21 Grams* have varied greatly, and in assessing its intentions both detractors and admirers have been prone to misjudge the film, albeit for different reasons. Many reviewers dismissed its radical devices as pretentious antics. Of those who noticed the film favorably, some, beguiled by its apparent fascination with coincidence, judged it to be a random exercise meant to reflect a random universe. However, *21 Grams* regards fate not as chance but as something inevitable and inescapable (although perhaps unknowable)—a sense enforced by its tightly wound, encircling design. Another view rationalized the film's fragmentation as the expression of a mind shattered by grief and despair, implying that director Alejandro González Iñárritu's method might be a version of Alain Resnais's stream-of-consciousness; but what interested Resnais was a flow of memory, feeling, or imagination coursing through (and erupting in) the awareness of an individual. What interests Iñárritu is not individual consciousness (or for that matter, memory) but time in general, time as the enveloping,

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permeable element where identities evolve and our fate plays out.

In crucial ways, *21 Grams* stands apart from other films that disrupt narrative and disorient us by veering into past and future. Most films that employ flashes back or leaps forward, that inject irruptions of memory or dream, premonition or clairvoyance, continue to privilege a single conception of the present. Even in those cases where time and location are weakly specified, there remains a here-and-now that we can grasp as our primary frame of reference. In *21 Grams* it is difficult to feel settled in a certain moment (or location), since past, present, and future continuously flow into one another, and appear equally real at all times. Similarly, *21 Grams* differs from other films that play variations on the *Rashomon*-theme; this device can be cumulative (we seem to learn more from each recital of the tale) or investigative (we are encouraged to sift through alternative versions and weigh the evidence), but Iñárritu challenges the usual assumptions of this strategy by suggesting that repeated viewings of an event, with variations, enlighten us mainly by confirming how much lies beyond our understanding.

The distinction of *21 Grams* lies in its intrinsic, thematic use of these and other techniques drawn from a reservoir of avant-garde strategies available since the outset of modernism: in the novel, we find them in Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner; in poetry, *The Wasteland* and *The Cantos*; in painting, Braque, Picasso, and Duchamp. In the development of cinema, alternatives to conventional narrative and linear time play a central role from the 1960s onward, in Resnais (*Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad*), Godard (*Weekend*), Buñuel (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*), and even Antonioni (*L'Avventura* forced viewers to modify their preconceptions of plot and forward progress). If the 1970s and 1980s seemed relatively quiet on this front (with the exception of *Betrayal,* which adapted Pinter's backward-unfolding play for the screen), by the 1990s the strategies began to emerge again, whether quietly, as in *Mystery Train,* with its parallel and reflecting stories, or bursting showily into the spotlight and the mainstream with *Pulp Fiction,* which superimposed a circular structure on linear narrative, producing a quasi-magical recycling of time, complete with resurrections.

Soon there would be a spate of films playing havoc with linearity: *Memento* and *Irreversible* told their stories in reverse; *Magnolia, Time Code,* and *The Hours* juxtaposed, overlapped, and cross-cut stories, releasing the potential of simultaneities and synchronicities; *The Sweet Hereafter* moved adroitly back and forth in time, in and out of its plots, to insidiously illuminating effect. Science fiction, action, and fantasy films altered the state of the present by flashing boldly into future and past and back again, reshaping as they went (the *Terminator* series, *Total Recall, Blade Runner, Strange Days,* and *Minority Report*); comedy got into the act with *Groundhog Day* and *50 First Dates; Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* dissolved, reshuffled, and reprised its narratives; Almodóvar's *Bad Education* added the time-warping effects of film-within-a-film to its non-linear exposition, allowing characters to rewrite the script (and revise the past).

However, most of these films are ultimately linear, in the sense that the underlying shape of their stories is meant to straighten itself out in our minds, and usually does. This is as true of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (causes and effects of the embedded tales are eventually revealed) as of *Memento* (although harder in that case, given its crippling memory handicap). Films may be told backwards, bent into loops, or atomized and reconstituted in surprising forms; they can manipulate their parallel or juxtaposed or converging stories in imaginative combinations, but eventually the narratives come out of hiding and let us solve their puzzles, disclosing their conventional beginnings, middles, and ends. *21 Grams* has different aims. While it does not intend to confuse (we can follow it without much difficulty, even on a first viewing), its aim is not to clarify but to deepen a mystery—a religious mystery. Just as it deprives us of expected certainties regarding time-relations and identity, it thwarts an effort to get to the bottom of things, to reach the end of the story; this stubborn resistance reflects a belief that revelation is more divine than human.

In the thorough way it adapts its method to express these views, *21 Grams* comes close to creating an authentically non-linear form. It falls short of this theoretical ideal for two reasons. First, it is burdened, as are all films, by the-problem-of-the-end (and its luridly melodramatic closing episodes can be considered as arguably its weakest point). Second, to fulfill its vision (of the power of sacrifice and the possibility of renewal), it adds a coda of hope, consisting of quick epiphanic images of the future. But what we most remember about *21 Grams,* and what constitutes the distinctive experience of the film, is not its final events and images but its compelling whole; what persuades us is its rigorous technique and its tragic vision, its fusion of radical style with classical content.

Admittedly, the film's most skeptical critics saw no such fusion, or even any necessary relation. They

found the fragmentary structure guilty of being elaborate finery for a naked emperor, and asked if anything would be left if we took away all of its arty dress. But wondering what would happen if we dismantled the film's editing is like asking what would remain if we removed the technique from Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. A naked woman? No—and yes. No, in the sense that to eliminate the multiple-exposure method is to miss everything the painting has to say about perception, time, and motion; yes, in the sense that beneath the razzle-dazzle of method there is a human figure, a woman walking downstairs dressed only in her flesh, and without her there would be no painting. In *21 Grams,* there would no film without the human story, composed of several plots whose nexus—as in *Amores Perros* (Iñárritu's first film, made in 2000)—is an urban intersection where an accident transforms the lives not only of those involved but also of their families and friends and others beyond, in rippling after-shocks. Here is a summary:

A man and his two young daughters are struck by a hit-and-run driver while crossing the street. All three die; the father, Michael (Danny Huston), is an organ donor and Paul (Sean Penn), a terminally ill mathematics professor, receives Michael's transplanted heart. Paul becomes obsessed with discovering his donor, which leads him to stalk, then encounter, and finally become involved with Michael's wife, Cristina (Naomi Watts), now a childless widow. Despite Cristina's horrified reaction to Paul's confession that he has received Michael's heart, they have a passionate affair. Meanwhile, the hit-and-run driver, Jack (Benicio del Toro), a petty criminal and ex-con but now a born-again Christian, feels so guilty that he turns himself in, despite the tearful pleas of his wife, Marianne (Melissa Leo). When he is released from prison, he refuses to stay with his family, retreating to a squalid motel on the outskirts of the city, working as a day laborer in a life of penance and exile. Cristina, meanwhile, becomes unhinged by grief and decides she must find and kill the hit-and-run driver, drawing the reluctant Paul—now ill again, as his transplanted heart begins to fail—into her plan. They find Jack at his hotel, leading to a jumbled final sequence in which Paul surprisingly shoots not Jack but himself. Paul finally dies. The film closes with a quickly displayed set of images of Jack returning to his family and Cristina pregnant with Paul's child. (A subplot concerning Paul's much-neglected wife, Mary [Charlotte Gainsbourg], and her insistent effort to have a child by Paul through artificial insemination, contributes thematically but has less impact on the fates of the principals.)

Photofest

Blood on their hands

Such a summary, recalling the hysterical inventions and involutions of long-running soap operas, sounds ludicrous, as the film's detractors have pointedly noted. But consider what would happen if we were to reduce certain familiar masterpieces to bald capsule summaries of their content. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* starts to sound absurdly over-determined and implausible—no one could have so much bad luck and be abused by so many people—rather than what it is, a grave work with a devastating sense of inexorability and great tragic resonance. In synopsis, Joyce's *Ulysses* (people take walks, have conversations, eat, drink, use the toilet*)* sounds trivial and tedious; *The Sound and the Fury,* mythically pretentious and psychoanalytically morbid; *Gravity's Rainbow,* preposterous and grotesque. *King Lear* sounds less like itself—a majestic and pitiless meditation on guilt and forgiveness—and more like an over-elaborate contrivance with too many sub-plots and too little realism, not to mention lurid violence, heavy-handed symbolism, and clichéd characters (the good Cordelia, the bad Edmund, the blind Gloucester, the deluded and ruined Lear). In sum, any storyline is raw material; what matters is what is made of it.

What is made of the material in *21 Grams* is a dark, impassioned tragedy, a shapely, surprisingly coherent structure, and a luminous film that trusts in the power and clarity of its imagery. It opens with a set of silent tableaux taken from near the end of the action, although when we first see them, we have no context for the images, and a result, they function less as parts

of a narrative, and more like paintings. In their oblique evocation of mood and emotion, they are like a Chardin still life, a Vuillard interior, or a Matisse room with a woman at a window. We see Cristina asleep on a bed while Paul sits beside her, smoking, gazing down; we see Paul slumped in a wrecked chair outside a desolate motel, in gray light; we see an abandoned swimming pool, choked with debris, under a brooding sky full of floating snow (this haunting image will recur, acquiring metaphorical connections with the pool where Cristina goes to swim). These introductory epiphanies yield to choppy glimpses of the plot's frantic climax (Jack driving a car at high speed, rushing an injured, bleeding Paul and a screaming Cristina to the hospital).

All this is prelude. It creates mood and establishes motifs—intimacy and isolation, speed and danger, violence and blood, risk and rescue—and it introduces us to the main characters, although as yet we do not know who they are or what has brought them together. The various subplots then begin to unfold, in a fragmentary, cross-cutting, to-and-fro fashion, which is disorienting relative to sequential exposition, but which, as we allow it to work on us, proves to be logical in terms of the film's ideas of subjective time and uncertain identity. We see Jack in prison, in church, and at work, at various stages in his life, looking different each time. We see Cristina in various psychological and physiological states: a contented housewife, a self-loathing cokehead, a plucky recovering substance abuser; we see her devastated by grief, then gripped by emotionally fuelled sexuality, and, finally, driven well beyond the edge of nervous breakdown. We see Paul bearded, haggard, and despairing, hooked to an oxygen tank; then looking fit and rested, handsome and dapper; then sick again but with a different look: less ravaged, more existentially tragic. As a corollary to the changes they endure, producing marked differences in appearance, the characters are shown in lights that make them resemble one another (Jack will come to look like Paul, Cristina to recall Paul's wife), and different settings are staged and shot in ways that echo each other (bedrooms, cars, restaurants, hospitals, prisons) and have a familiar feel, even the first time we see them.

Throughout, *21 Grams* is unstinting in its slicing, looping, out-of-order juxtapositions. Until quite late in the film, when we have reached (again) the final sequence of events, it never comes to rest, never allows us a comfortable sense of the present; through this constant shifting away from any single point of balance (any single explanation), the film implicitly argues against serial coherence as the key to comprehension, suggesting that the motions of existence are not forward but circular (things happen to us over and over, often in different guises), lateral, and diagonal; that revelation does not necessarily lie in the final chapter or the denouement, but may spring upon us suddenly and when we least expect it; that reality is all that is the case, and the characters all that they seem to be. Relative to the psychology of human development, this undercuts the premise that we are most ourselves when we are confident in self-definition and successful in self-presentation; we are equally real, it suggests, when we are out of control, confused, obsessed, deluded, ill, pathetic: we are all of those people—the people we were then, and the people we will yet be.

Where uncertainties about identity connect with the issue of fate, Iñárritu's technique again becomes structurally eloquent. There is a felt tension between his fragmentary method, with its backward loops and sidelong veers, and the innate tendency of any narrative to move ahead. This tension echoes his dialectical questions about causality and destiny: Is fate arbitrary and unknowable (something has occurred but who knows why), as the fracturing and compulsive circling might suggest (nothing leads to anything else, nothing explains)? Or is it highly determined (moving inexorably toward an inescapable endpoint, as the plotlines pulse forward)?

Any effort to understand fate is complicated by the film's intricately and repeatedly re-folded method: we see the aftermath of an event before it happens, and later we pick out a few fateful threads winding their way toward the event, but we are never afforded the luxury of an overview (where an overall causal pattern might be discerned), because our perceptions become enmeshed—like the characters'—in proliferating aftereffects, and our reactions reshaped by what is happening at the moment. Nothing stays still. The style of *21 Grams* conceptualizes time in the manner of John Ashbery's long poems (*A Wave* or *Flow-Chart*), eroding our sense of the present, revealing that the past is not a fixed point but a series of dissolving perceptions, composed of what becomes of us, and the future is not a location that lies ahead, but all that we are now becoming.

Or as the mantra voiced repeatedly by the film's characters would have it, "Life goes on." But the apparent folk-wisdom of this homily is fiercely repudiated by Cristina when her family has been obliterated, and challenged by the film as a whole; life may go on but not in the ways we supposed. The film's other and closely related mantra is "who am I now." When Jack returns from prison and his wife complains, "I don't

know who you are now," he answers that he is now "saved," although she retorts that she preferred who he was before. Jack struggles endlessly to change his life, going straight, giving up drugs and alcohol, trying to learn a new job, penitentially returning to prison, and finally, becoming No One, anonymous and almost unrecognizable. Cristina has been transformed by devastation, although she struggled with identity issues long before the accident: she has been a good-time girl whose drug use was heavy enough to land her in intensive care; a member of a 12-step group; a pert suburban housewife; and an aspirant ideal mother. After the tragedy we see her drawn into a new cycle of abuse and alteration. Meanwhile, as Paul processes his own enormous changes, from illness to health and back again, shifting from one relationship to another, he becomes the epitome of a man "trying to find himself." Challenged on his effort to find his heart-donor, he answers, I need to know who I am now.

The question of who he is blurs into the question of *what:* the one to be saved, or the savior? He was saved first by the transplant and a second time, emotionally, through the affair with Cristina. As hope fades again, he is dragged into Cristina's deranged revenge-quest, but he manages to short-circuit a new cycle of mayhem through the paradoxical act of shooting himself. The symbolic roles of Paul and Jack then seem to switch: while Jack had appeared as a Christ-figure, whose self-immolation aimed (against all evidence) at a beneficial outcome, it is Paul whose sacrifice enables Jack and Cristina to repair their lives. Who are these people? The answer is complicated by the changes they go through and their interchangeable images, engendering a blurred uncertainty that parallels the film's rejection of a unitary, stable present tense. The desire to know who we are, to understand what made us this way, to acquire a sense of self, is a normal human wish, but in the film's world, it may not be granted. And for Iñárritu, character is not necessarily destiny: there are larger forces at work, which have designs on us, although it is hard to know what they are—to know what fate has in store for us.

The unseen starting point of Sophocles's Oedipus Trilogy is an intersection where lives collide with profound after-shocks: a traffic-altercation on the road to Delphi (an early case of road-rage) leads to a murder. Years later, the victim is revealed to have been the killer's father, through a process of discovery full of misdirection and misinterpretation. *Oedipus Rex* demonstrates that the urge to find out what lies behind events and to discover one's true identity—no matter how nobly heroic or humanly necessary the quest appears—is fraught with peril, since what we most want to find out could prove to be our undoing. Iñárritu, who explores some of the themes of *Oedipus Rex* (the interplay of character and destiny, the nature of the gods, the limits of the will), shares Sophocles's skepticism about an individual's power to get to the heart of the matter.

The film's expressive structure replicates the difficulties and limits of knowing, through its reprises and second-looks (returns to the scene of the crime), which respond to an irresistible impulse—to re-examine, to seek understanding—while casting doubt on its efficacy and its results. The film continuously reverts to the moments before Jack climbs into his truck and turns on the ignition, about to become a hit-and-run killer. Each time we see the scene, it fleshes out more of what went before, and each time we anticipate an answer—drink, drugs, rage, distraction (glancing down at his compact disc player?)—but nothing explains it. We return repeatedly to the father and daughters just before the accident—leaving a restaurant, walking toward the intersection, pausing, talking, playing; at each flashback we see more and each time we hope to discover some key—careless parenting, rebellious children, poor planning on the city's part (an intersection without a stop sign?)—but we are disappointed. Cristina returns to the site, prowls around the intersection, talks to someone who was near at the time, but learns nothing. These reprises undermine our belief that if we look closely enough we will find an answer, if we look often enough, we will see what we missed. Iñárritu stresses the point with an almost comically deflationary image: Earlier in the day we see Cristina swimming with her sister; as she climbs from the pool and walks away, she looks back and laughs but we don't know why. Later, shown the scene again from Cristina's angle, we see what was withheld and why she laughed: her sister is flashing her middle finger.

But the film does not mock our will to know; it acknowledges our need to come to terms with our past, to understand why things turned out as they did. We thrive on explanation and causation. And we enjoy laying the blame at someone's door, preferably the door of some Other (a craven bureaucratic entity or its representative is a popular choice—*The Sweet Hereafter* is insightful on this point). Even if we find no one to blame, we continue to look for causes, weighing nature against nurture, asking what-ifs: What if I had had the guts to leave when I said I would, instead of staying? What if I had had the courage to stay and make things right, instead of fleeing? In one of his poems, the Australian poet John Tranter wonders

what might have happened if, instead of growing up on a remote farm in rural Victoria, he had been born into the circumstances of Frank O'Hara. Would he have written O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*? Would he have been struck and killed by a speeding dune buggy one summer night on Fire Island? *21 Grams* acknowledges our fascination with these questions while remaining doubtful of our ability to answer them.

Iñárritu's philosophical skepticism finds its outward and visible symbol in the end-of-the-world wasteland of the final scenes and its abandoned swimming pool, shot through a sky full of slowly falling flakes of snow, gray as volcanic ash. The metaphor would suggest abandoned hopes if this were a secular work, but in a film obsessed with sacrifice and salvation, whose main characters are named Paul Rivers and Jack Jordan, where Cristina reveals that she feels most human and alive immersed in water, there remains the possibility, the hope or faith, that the pool can be refilled.

After Paul's new heart begins to fail and his doctor urges him to stay in the hospital where he can be cared for, Paul asks, "If I do, will I be saved?" Although the question underscores the limited nature of help available from the helping professions, the film avoids making easy targets of these people; its doctors are not the caricatures we meet in John Sayles' films, where people in authoritative roles are always suspect, often corrupt. Here they are usually well meaning, but because they represent secular systems, they can offer only mechanical solutions (artificial insemination, implanted hearts), not emotional or spiritual aid.

Iñárritu's central themes—the elusiveness of identity and the inscrutability of destiny—converge in a single question at the heart of spiritual doubt: Why was I chosen for this fate? Why me? The religious question is thus entangled with the issue of identity, whose self-discovery involves a quest in time-past and projection into a future that alters us beyond recognition. The structure, method, and imagery of the film are exquisitely attuned to these questions and issues, and are shaped into a responsive medium for their exploration.

The importance for Iñárritu of the themes of destiny and identity is further affirmed by the central role they also play in *Amores Perros*. There, the conundrum of identity is given an intriguing twist in the story of a scruffy, hirsute street-person gradually revealed to be a former terrorist; later, cutting off his beard and changing his clothes, he is visually transformed back into the middle-class professional he was before his odyssey began. In its treatment of the themes we find in *21 Grams, Amores Perros* is a superior film in one regard—its persuasive evocation of contrasting socio-economic classes as it crosscuts and interweaves stories across Mexico City. *21 Grams* has a strongly conveyed sense of the working-class, prison-and-church milieu of Jack and his family, but its sociological grasp of the middle-class world of Cristina is shaky at best and clichéd at worst, a weakness linked to the implausibility of Sean Penn as a mathematics professor. (If these soft spots seem relatively unimportant, it is because the performances of Watts and Penn come blazing out of their presumptive contexts and cast them into the shade.) While *Amores Perros*' delineation of the strata of Mexico City has an authenticity never achieved by *21 Grams*' odd hybrid of Memphis and Albuquerque, *21 Grams* remains on balance a more powerful film, because its structure is tighter, its coherence greater. *21 Grams,* despite its 125-minute length, seems elliptical and evocative, spare and compact, thanks to the clarity of its technical aims and the authority of its vision. If we grant the intrinsic relation of Iñárritu's method to his themes, we should be able to conclude that the film is quite the opposite of random or incoherent: on the contrary, its shape is sculptural and clear, and its development is deliberate and inevitable.

But even if the expressive logic of *21 Grams*' structure is conceded, some may continue to find the film too much: too melodramatic, too baroquely emotive, and above all, too bleak. Some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stagings of *King Lear* omitted the last act, regarding Cordelia dead in Lear's arms as more than audiences could handle. Some viewers of *21 Grams* concluded that its relentless catastrophes were more than anyone should need to contend with—not only too implausible, but also too disastrous, too overloaded with dread. Yet the paradox of tragic art is that the stoniest view of human error and suffering, when transmuted into drama, is the one most likely to provide release and even exhilaration. In its passion, its unflinching inquiry, and its rigorous aesthetic, *21 Grams* has a certain satisfaction to offer, not unlike the catharsis of classical tragedy.

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Abstract Although sometimes dismissed as an arty melodrama, *21 Grams* is an important, original film, distinguished by its application of modernist techniques to the materials of classical tragedy. Its fragmented method and non-linear form are not artificial but eloquently expressive of its themes: subjective time, uncertain identity, and unknowable fate.

Book Reviews

African Film

Re-Imagining a Continent

By Josef Gugler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003. $59.95 cloth; $24.95 paper.

English-language studies of the vastly underrepresented field of African cinema are always welcome, and now sociology professor Josef Gugler has brought his extensive knowledge of African society to a brief survey of a select body of films in an effort to direct attention to this marginalized world cinema. *African Film: Re-Imagining a Continent* begins its exploration by announcing the laudable goal of helping Western viewers to "re-imagine" Africa through close readings of 17 films from the last 34 years.

Gugler's project is an attempt to liberate African images that have been colonized by Western ways of seeing and circulated in the global mediascape to perpetuate nostalgic, "Garden of Eden" views of the continent, such as those in Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (United States, 1985). The author hopes that in doing so, he will help Africa's filmmakers to present more complex portraits of the continent on their own terms, while still engaging in a fruitful dialogue with the West. Disdainful of "the Manichean stance characteristic of much politically engaged art" (97), Gugler suggests that African filmmakers would do well to transcend the shoestring production values and adherence to Italian neorealist conventions that he finds characteristic of many African films, and instead address a larger audience. The prescriptions he makes ultimately lead the author into a conflicted relationship with Hollywood's influence on African cinema, but along the way he offers some useful suggestions for changing the way we look at a richly diverse yet neglected regional film culture.

African Film is divided into six thematic sections: "Recovering the African Past," "Fighting Colonialism," "The Struggle for Majority Rule in South Africa," "Betrayals of Independence," "The Exploited and Neglected Peasantry," and "Between the African Mass Market and International Recognition." Each section is introduced by the historical context of each theme that the succeeding two or three films are held to embody. These outlines, taken together with the general introduction, are helpful as background information and address the perhaps justifiably imagined Western reader who is almost completely ignorant of Africa and its cinema.

Through an examination of symptomatic meanings, *African Film* makes its most significant contribution to African cinema scholarship by expanding the three central themes of African film outlined in Manthia Diawara's landmark book *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (University of Indiana Press, 1992). The specificity with which Gugler treats the narrative patterns of social realism, colonial confrontation, and return to the source help to expand the critical vocabulary. Rather than follow the conventional categories exactly, Gugler shows readers in more detail how social realism needs to include sub-themes (post-independence disillusionment) and focus more closely on certain elements of African society (the peasantry). He also productively employs an examination of the anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, as represented in *Mapantsula* (South Africa, 1985), and factional divisions in the Zimbabwean independence movement, as evidence that representations of colonial confrontation should not be homogenized across the continent.

African Film requires no prior specialized knowledge of film studies and resists the critical frameworks usually found in contemporary film scholarship. Readers committed to auteurism, formalism, psychoanalysis, and a bevy of other approaches will probably not find much here of interest. Gugler steers clear of the current debates about national cinemas and Third Cinema, and instead offers straightforward close readings, albeit firmly grounded in broader contexts. The book covers a vast landscape in a brief amount of time: political history, production conditions, plot summary, biographical information on the directors, data about the films' reception, and assessment of acting performances are all fair game. Individual film commentaries average six to seven pages, plus two to three illustrations, especially promotional posters and production stills, but also unfortunately too many screen grabs of exceedingly poor quality. In this attempt to pack much into little space, the book does not quite deliver the "comprehensive accounts" of the films the author promises in the introduction (7).

Readers may face an unfortunate conundrum, as the plot summaries offered for each film are too detailed for those who have seen the films, and not comprehensive enough for those who have not. A background in African literature would likely be beneficial; Gugler's interest in the literary culture of Africa becomes apparent as he spends a significant proportion of space delving into the source material from which many of the films were adapted. The emphasis on adaptation as an organizing principle is helpful in exploring the dialogic relationship between different cultural arenas, illuminating the preoccupations of the films and contrasting the implied audiences for the differing media. However, this focus is employed somewhat inconsistently and it sometimes seems to outweigh the amount of time given to discussion of the actual films, as is the case with *Sambizanga* and *A Dry White Season*.

Occasionally, however, the author's hit-and-run strategy rewards the attentive reader handsomely: Gugler's discussion of Ousmane Sembène's novel and film *Xala* is tightly focused and richly insightful despite its brevity. His account of the story from script to novel to film, with its changing political stances and divergent audiences, is highly informative. His argument for the omissions and additions, grounded in Sembène's search for funding for the film in the early 1970s, is utterly convincing. It is in this chapter that Gugler finds the perfect balance between the

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One of the difficulties in offering this type of survey is that it will undoubtedly draw comparisons to two relatively recent books on African film: Diawara's book and Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema* (University of California Press, 1994). Diawara's history of the industry is more detailed and tightly focused, and Ukadike's is much longer and more comprehensive. Gugler's is neither an expansion nor an update, nor should it be expected to be. Because of his desire to do so much in only a few pages, Gugler specifically chose a handful of films that assist him in providing mounting evidence for a carefully constructed argument about the state of Africa's film culture. Some major films (*Wend Kuuni, Yeelen*) and directors (Djibril Diop Mambéty and Souleymane Cissé) are neglected in favor of lesser-known efforts such as Saddik Balewa's *Kasarmu Ce* (Nigeria, 1991), and half of the films chosen were made in the mid-to-late 1990s.

The latter criterion seems in keeping with Gugler's thesis that only very recently have African filmmakers begun to "re-image" their international self-representation. This might explain his interest in newer films, but elsewhere he seems to criticize contemporary works such as Ingrid Sinclair's *Flame* (Zimbabwe, 1996) for being too overtly political and too narrowly African (i.e., telling "African stories" in an "African mode"). Further, one of his ostensibly strongest examples of successful "re-imaging" is the universal appeal of one of the oldest films he looks at, *La Vie est belle* (Democratic Republic of Congo, 1987). Issues of chronology notwithstanding, Gugler clearly still has his finger on the pulse of African film.

One significant problem in *African Film* manifests itself in Gugler's oscillating attitude toward Hollywood cinema and the related issue of interaction between Africa and the West. He dislikes both Hollywood-style films and didactic political cinema, with the presumed middle ground being African films that escape the stereotypes imposed on them from the West. However, he simultaneously insists that these films adopt Western conventions of form and style in order to secure a larger audience. Arguing that Euzhan Palcy's Hollywoodization in *A Dry White Season* serves to turn a fascinatingly ambiguous novel into a neatly resolved narrative where Good triumphs over Evil, Gugler asserts that the happy ending comes at the expense of an intellectually challenging story. This assessment may be justified, but it is interesting to note that he later celebrates the just-as-neatly-resolved happy ending of the film he closes the book with, *La Vie est belle,* a "musical comedy" and one of "two outstanding efforts to move beyond the 'African film' that recall well-established film genres," (179). While his assertion that African cinema is promisingly becoming more universal, even more Western, may be partially true, a more thorough interrogation of the potential political consequences of this change would be welcome. As African films find comfort in "well-established" forms (i.e., Hollywood conventions), it is important to ask whose conception of the universe is referenced in a more "universal" style, and it will be necessary to keep a careful watch over the possible cultural imperialism that could ensue.

Gugler concludes by asking, "Is it sufficient to watch or do we have an obligation to act?" (193). Readers are hailed as "citizens of the world who have a measure of responsibility towards our fellow humans," but the details of this responsibility are never made clear, paralleling his vision of the future for African cinema vis-à-vis Hollywood. Gugler admittedly has a preference for open-ended narratives, so it is perhaps fitting that resolutions must be postponed for now. *African Film* is a useful starting point for finding answers, and its extensive footnotes and bibliography will be of invaluable assistance to those confronted with these questions for the first time.

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Authorship and Film

An AFI Film Reader

Edited by David A. Gerstner & Janet Staiger. New York: Routledge, 2002. $25.95.

From the vantage point of the summer of *Van Helsing* (2004), the author increasingly resembles the monster that will not die, the mesmerizing figure that the field of film studies has been unable and unwilling to exorcise. From D. W. Griffith to the present, Romantic theories of authorship have validated film as an art form similar to the theater, the novel, poetry, music, and the plastic arts. Motion pictures were not just mindless entertainments designed to reconcile the masses to their lot in life: some of them were works of art. The film director (or screenwriter, or producer) was the equivalent of these more traditional artists.

John Caughie's seminal anthology, *Theories of Authorship* (Routledge, 1981), provides an excellent account of the evolution of authorship from "the author of the fiction" to "the fiction of the author," following a trajectory that takes us from Sarris and Wollen to Barthes, Heath, and Metz.

Andrew Sarris and the auteurists at *Cahiers du cinéma,* following Astruc, understood the cinema as a language of images and sounds through which an artist could express his or her thoughts. Peter Wollen reinvented *auteurism* in the form of *auteur*-structuralism, transforming Sarris's *a priori* creative figure into an *a posteriori* construction produced by the spectator to identify the particular bundles of oppositions that structured a group of texts associated with the author figure.

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Semiotics and psychoanalysis reinvented the notion of the author yet again, understanding the author as a feature

of the process of subject construction that takes place within every text. If Wollen's *auteur* was the product of critical activities on the part of spectators, this new generation of author figures was the product of the process of filmic enunciation, i.e. of the work of the text's own operations. In this formulation, both the author and the spectator are illusory constructions of the text: fictions. The apparent coherence of the film-text produces an illusion of subject unity within the spectator who, in turn, ascribes this unity and coherence to an enunciating subject—the author.

In proclaiming the death of the author, Roland Barthes attempted to destroy the authority of texts and to empower the reader. The critique of Romantic *auteurism* sought to expose authorship as an ideological effect of stylistic and narrative practices designed to delude spectators. The author was inextricably bound up with the dominant ideology and its reproduction of bourgeois subjects. But, as Pam Cook argued, writing about avant-garde film in Caughie's anthology, notions of authorial self-expression should not necessarily be dismissed when dealing with alternative cinematic practices. In other words, the concept of authorship has counter-hegemonic potential when applied to the work of personal filmmakers such as Maya Deren, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Joyce Weiland, Chantal Ackerman, and Yvonne Rainer.

The new AFI reader, *Authorship and Film,* edited by David Gerstner and Janet Staiger, explores the premise of Cook's argument. Their reader reinvents theories of authorship yet again—this time from the perspective of cultural studies. Gerstner and Staiger seek to restore the power and status of the author as a means of recognizing "agency for minority production." If the "fiction of the author" left an empty space at the heart of textual operations, Gerstner and Staiger want to put certain women, minority, and artisanal filmmakers back into that space.

Their basic argument is that minority filmmakers working on the fringes of dominant filmmaking practice constitute a counter-hegemonic practice (see Hugh Bartling's essay on Oscar Micheaux). Their voices as authors emerge against the grain of mainstream cinematic practice and, "in a nondominant situation, who is speaking does matter." It matters for women, for racial and ethnic minorities, and for gays and lesbians. In re-empowering the author, however, Gerstner and Staiger are not endorsing a return to bourgeois subjectivity as the locus of meaning in a text. Rather, they are endorsing the multi-cultural emphasis on "identity politics."

To some extent, their privileging of an oppositional stance on the part of filmmakers recalls the Romantic notions of authorship developed by Sarris decades ago. Sarris argued that "the auteur theory values the personality of the director precisely because of the *barriers* to its expression" [emphasis added]. For Sarris, such directors as Hitchcock and Hawks were *auteurs* because they could achieve personal expression in the face of the constraints imposed on them by Hollywood. Obviously, minority authors faced and continue to face a more hostile filmmaking environment than Hitchcock or Hawks ever did. Minority *auteurs* lack the institutional support that the Hollywood studios provided to its directors in the form of access to financing and distribution. And the minority *auteurs* in the reader—Joan Harrison, Oscar Micheaux, Rusty Cundieff, John Waters, Len Lye, Willie Varela, the Scribe Video Center, and others—are not viewed as transcendent artists, but as representative figures of disempowered groups. Hitchcock and Hawks, by comparison, can at best only be seen as subversive countercurrents within the larger mainstream, but this reader's appeal to the notion of authorship as a form of resistance to the dominant system shares similarities with the early "politics" of *auteurism* as a repudiation of prevailing tastes (those of "the Tradition of Quality" in France or Hollywood's middle-brow classics of social significance).

Both Gerstner and Staiger write separate introductions. One could read this as a nod to the authorial diversity of the volume as a whole. Both editors review the usual suspects —Astruc, the *Cahiers* group, Sarris, Wollen, Buscombe, Heath, Barthes, and Foucault. Gerstner's interest lies in the history of the discourse on authorship and its relationship to progressive or reactionary political agendas (Truffaut and company set a reactionary agenda; Barthes and Foucault sought to use "the space left empty by the author's disappearance" for a more radical questioning of the relationship of discourse to power). Staiger's focus tends to be a bit more pragmatic. Historically, authorship has been identified as an instrument of humanism and capitalism; but the "death of the author comes at a time particularly nonadvantageous for some individuals—feminists, gay and lesbian activists, and antiracists." She reviews various approaches to authorship (authorship as origin, as personality, as a sociology of production, as signature, as reading strategy, as site of discourses, and as technique of the self). Staiger concludes with an endorsement of this latter approach—the viability of expressions of the self by and for minority subjects, reclaiming the space left empty by the death of the author as a site for the expression of identity politics.

Though Staiger discusses authorship in terms of "agents" who make "speech-act propositions" (using the language of J. L. Austin), it's not entirely clear that the anthology has rethought authorship in terms of speech-act theory. Notions of authorship set forth in the majority of the essays are fairly conventional—even old fashioned. Peter Wollen contributes a fine essay on Michael Curtiz and *Casablanca,* but his basic argument seems to rest on the fact that Curtiz was a manic-depressive and that some of these traits manifest themselves in his central characters. The feigning of cowardice by Rocky (James Cagney) at the end of *Angels With Dirty Faces,* and the false bravado of Rick (Humphrey Bogart) in *Casablanca* (he "acts the hero and the idealist, hiding his true feelings of loss and betrayal"), draw attention to this manic-depressive world view.

George Custen provides an excellent essay on Irving Berlin, Darryl Zanuck, and the history of the production of *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Custen situates Berlin-as-author within larger creative communities and argues that he asserted his own authorship of music at the expense of

these communities. Berlin insisted that *he* had invented ragtime, refusing to acknowledge the influence of African-American musicians and composers on his own work. *Alexander's Ragtime Band* "explores the nature of creativity," situating it within a system of individual relationships and institutions that define it. A quasi-autobiographical work, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* was based on a treatment written by Berlin. The film's other *auteur* is producer Darryl Zanuck, who rewrote Berlin's self-absorbed story of his own genius into a more commercial love story in which Alexander's somewhat snobbish concern for "class and distinction" gives way to "the down and dirty style" of ragtime. A fictional bio-pic, the film is essentially Zanuck's version of the story of Irving Berlin.

In her essay on producer Joan Harrison, Christina Lane seems to identify Harrison as an *auteur,* in part, on the basis of the central character in *Phantom Lady,* Kansas (Ella Raines), who is modeled on Harrison. Much as Harrison rose from secretary (to Alfred Hitchcock) to screenwriter and producer, so Kansas transforms herself from secretary to sleuth, solving the mystery of the phantom lady and setting her boss free from jail.

In his essay on John Waters, Walter Metz reads *Pecker* and *Cecil B. Demented* as autobiographical texts staging different scenarios for Waters in terms of his relationship to Hollywood. In *Pecker,* "a Waters-like Baltimore teenager . . . becomes famous among the New York avant-garde set" as a photographer, but ultimately "rejects his fame, returning to his life in Baltimore." In *Cecil B. Demented,* "a Waters-like twenty-something filmmaker . . . kidnaps a Hollywood starlet and forces her to play the lead in his underground movie," only to be tracked down and killed by the police at the end. For Metz, these films define Waters' options as an artist: either "retreat to obscurity in Baltimore or tragic martyrdom" as an underground film revolutionary.

Wollen, Custen, Lane, and Metz take *auteurism* back to the clanging cell door of the police station where Alfred Hitchcock was (supposedly) briefly detained as a young boy. Authorship is seen here as an expression of biographical experience. This is a form of what is referred to in the field as "vulgar *auteurism*" (based on the term "vulgar Marxism," which refers to overly literal applications of the concept). Sarris and the 1950s *Cahiers* group tended to privilege style as the locus of authorial presence in a text. Semiotics—from Bellour and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis to Nick Browne and the 1970s *Cahiers* collective—also emphasized enunciative strategies in defining authorial persona. If "speech-act theory" were to be applied to cinematic authorship, Gerstner and Staiger's new *auteurism* might have moved theories of authorship forward into the new millennium. But their conflation of authorship and identity politics makes who is speaking and what is said more important than how it is said. For Sarris, it was "not so much *what* as *how*" (in a context in which "how" was equated to "mise-en-scène"). For Gerstner and Staiger, authorial speech acts matter "to those in non-dominant positions in which asserting even a partial agency may seem to be important for day-to-day survival." From this perspective, the more or less direct equation of author and work is politically necessary if the speech-act is to have any value as a representation of "the historically voiceless."

What the new anthology illustrates is a feature of *auteurism* that has traditionally been under-explored. *Auteurism* and theories of authorship have always been political weapons used by critics to challenge a dominant taste, ideology, or culture. Sarris and Truffaut used it to elevate works of "crass" commercial cinema over those of traditional art cinema. Barthes used it to overthrow the tyranny of the author and install the reader in its place. Althusserian Marxists (Heath, Metz, Oudart) exposed the fiction of the author as part of a larger project to lay bare the ideological operations of patriarchal capitalism. Gerstner and Staiger use *auteurism* to give agency to those traditionally denied it. Each theory of authorship subverts its predecessor in a pattern that is relentlessly Oedipal. *Auteurism* is not so much a theory as it is a crime scene to which critics and theorists seem to be drawn again and again. The bodies on the floor may change but the scene remains the same.

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The Couch and the Silver Screen

Psychoanalytic Reflections on European Cinema

Edited by Andrea Sabbadini. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003. $78.95 cloth; $33.95 paper.

In November 2001, The First Psychoanalytic Film Festival was held in London. The gathering included an international coterie of practicing psychoanalysts, a number of eminent film studies scholars, and a handful of film directors, including two from the worldwide pantheon, Bernardo Bertolucci and Michael Apted. Conference presentations and panel discussions produced cogent insights, lively debates, and shared laughter. What better audience could there be for Bertolucci's jokes about his own megalomania and that of his friend Francis Coppola, with whom he competed to make the longer film? "We could go further into . . . the childish omnipotence of the film director," Bertolucci quipped. One difficulty of the resulting volume, *The Couch and the Silver Screen: Psychoanalytic Reflections on European Cinema,* edited by Andrea Sabbadini, a member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, is that although the transcribed conversations do suggest "the stimulating atmosphere of the event" that the editor hoped to convey (7), there could have been more development of significant concepts and connections. Coming into existence after the fact and over time, a volume such as this certainly does afford the opportunity to "go further."

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Psychoanalytic Reflections on European Cinema

Edited by Andrea Sabbadini. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003. $78.95 cloth; $33.95 paper.

In November 2001, The First Psychoanalytic Film Festival was held in London. The gathering included an international coterie of practicing psychoanalysts, a number of eminent film studies scholars, and a handful of film directors, including two from the worldwide pantheon, Bernardo Bertolucci and Michael Apted. Conference presentations and panel discussions produced cogent insights, lively debates, and shared laughter. What better audience could there be for Bertolucci's jokes about his own megalomania and that of his friend Francis Coppola, with whom he competed to make the longer film? "We could go further into . . . the childish omnipotence of the film director," Bertolucci quipped. One difficulty of the resulting volume, *The Couch and the Silver Screen: Psychoanalytic Reflections on European Cinema,* edited by Andrea Sabbadini, a member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, is that although the transcribed conversations do suggest "the stimulating atmosphere of the event" that the editor hoped to convey (7), there could have been more development of significant concepts and connections. Coming into existence after the fact and over time, a volume such as this certainly does afford the opportunity to "go further."

Nevertheless, the anthology is intellectually deep and rewards concentrated attention. The book is divided into four sections, all but one of which contain transcripts of panel presentations and the question and answer sessions with audiences that followed. The first section, "Set and Stage," is comprised of Chapter One, the Bertolucci "encounter" (Sabbadini's word) with British stage actor Fiona Shaw and psychoanalyst Chris Mawson, and Chapter Two, a conversation about Samuel Beckett's *Film* (1964) with film scholar Ian Christie, actress Juliet Stevenson, and psychoanalyst Helen Taylor Robinson. The other sections of the book, "Working through Trauma," "Horror Perspectives," and "Documenting Internal Worlds," include three additional discussions and 11 scholarly essays complete with footnotes and bibliographical references. The editor's introduction and the foreword by Laura Mulvey, a professor of film and media studies at the University of London and one of the most well-respected psychoanalytic feminist film theorists, locate the volume in the context of prior writing about cinema and psychoanalysis.

Mulvey's elegant foreword is one of the highlights of the book. In a few pages, she eloquently summarizes the implications of the choice to concentrate on European rather than Hollywood films. Whereas classical Hollywood cinema was marked by certain "defining obsessions" that have been aptly explored through feminist film theory from the 1970s onward, "the focus on European cinema produces motifs and themes that lead to a very different psychic world" (xv). The impact of traumatic events and the impression of "horror" scenarios on our unconscious minds are preoccupations of European cinema and psychoanalysis alike, as is the question of the relationship between personal psychic disturbance and catastrophic events of a public historical nature. Mulvey speculates that Freud would have found more to like in the recursive narratives of European cinema than he did in Hollywood's fascination with modernity and the "emblematic representation of femininity refracted through the star system" (xv).

Sabbadini's turn to Europe from Hollywood is less well explained, almost abrupt. Or perhaps it is at root more politically strategic. One understands his urge to resist "the overwhelming commercial domination of Hollywood's products" in order to concentrate on "films produced and directed on this [that] side of the Atlantic" (7-8). The book's focus on films that have not received much scholarly attention and/or have not been widely seen is refreshing. Chapters on non-canonical works (Dominik Moll's *Harry: He's Here to Help,* Vinko Bresan's *Marshal Tito's Spirit,* and Michal Aviad's *Ever Shot Anyone?,* among other films that have inspired attention) coexist with discussions of Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*. What is unfortunate, however, is that this worthwhile reorientation comes at the expense of Hollywood cinema, the products of which are dismissed between two very telling double dashes as "—technically sophisticated, but often ideologically and artistically poor—" (7-8) in relation to Europe's "quality films." In fact, Hollywood has not cornered the market on bad films, and ideological poverty sounds like something well worth investigating.

Sabbadini also seems too quick to pass over prior writing on cinema and psychoanalysis, and I wonder whether that is because of a perception that it too hails from the wrong side of the water. Janet Bergstrom's anthology *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (University of California Press, 1999) was also derived from a conference that brought together an international group of practicing psychoanalysts and film theorists. This prior conference, held in Los Angeles in November 1993, was an occasion to explore the affinities along with the "non-convergence" of cinema and psychoanalysis as institutions and psychic machines. Sabbadini does cite Bergstrom's volume and other publications that he deems "important," but, in framing his own project as one that "moves beyond" previous work, he neglects to engage with some very good ideas already in circulation, in particular Bergstrom's point about the dissonance between some of the goals and proclivities of cinema and psychoanalysis. Sabbadini's introduction, with perhaps some further editorial commentary at the start of each section of the book, would have been enhanced by a more substantive consideration of the interrelationships between the various chapters and previous scholarly and creative work on cinema and psychoanalysis.

This said, the thematic organization of the book still does reflect and further enable explorations outside of, and perhaps "beyond," the common paradigms for the psychoanalytic interpretation of texts, paradigms that include psychologizing characters as if they were real people, psychologizing the author, psychologizing the text, and psychologizing the spectator. The essays in *The Couch and the Silver Screen* are all of very high quality and most of them do approach psychologically themed films and/or films that open to psychoanalytical study with notable originality. Elizabeth Cowie's chapter, "The Cinematic Dream-Work of Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries,*" is stunningly good. Beginning from the familiar analogy between cinema and dreaming and invoking the ground-breaking work of Christian Metz in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (1974), Cowie argues that the dream-work is not the hiding and finding of a filigree of preexisting messages, nor should film interpretation be understood as a search for motives and motifs. The dream-work is "the discovery of the meaning of the dreaming," a "process or encounter involving a production in which a symbolizing representation emerges" (188). In watching and recalling films, we likewise engage in a dream-work in which we produce "a 'manifest' film which we construct from our memory" (188). This explains why we sometimes misremember what we have seen in a film or come up with meanings different than those attributed by others. As viewers we are "dreamers and dream-interpreters, analysands and analysts" (188). It would have been great had Sabbadini said something about how Cowie's description of cinema spectatorship as a productive encounter between a person and a film relates to the ideas about spectator identification broached in the

conversation about Nanni Moretti's *The Son's Room* in Chapter Three, or to the lure of "body horror" films for adolescent viewers discussed in Donald Campbell's chapter, "Dario Argento's *Phenomena*." But these colorful threads and others weave through the book and are there for the reader to discern.

That the book is the product of an illuminating meeting does seem to influence its commitment to the exterior and interior lives of the people who create, are the subjects of, and engage with cinema in general and European films in particular. As this volume profusely illustrates, European cinema is constructed in and through the connections between psychic reality and the imposing world as we know it. *The Couch and the Silver Screen* amply and at times brilliantly reflects and refracts the full spectrum light that cinema and psychoanalysis emit.

Janet Walker is Professor and Chair of the Department of Film Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she is also affiliated with the Women's Studies Program. She is author of *Couching Resistance: Women, Film, and Psychoanalytic Psychiatry* and of a forthcoming book entitled *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust.*

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Dancing Machines

Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

By Felicia McCarren. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. $50.00.

On an 1896 poster advertising the then-new technology of the cinema, a Loie Fuller-esque dancer figure spreads her voluminous skirts to provide a surface for the projected image of a train. This poster neatly allegorizes the central themes of Felicia McCarren's book, *Dancing Machines*: the close connections between dance and the developing technology of the cinema at the turn of the century, and the convergence of dancer and machine in modernism's obsession with movement. Focusing specifically on the Parisian avant-garde from the turn of the century through the 1930s, *Dancing Machines* succeeds in its attempt to re-place dance into the history of early modern machine culture. McCarren's book charts the evolution of dance from its status as front-page news, even at a moment of burgeoning technophilia, to its subordination to those very technologies it helped develop and sustain. As McCarren writes of the Loie Fuller poster, "the most popular dancer in Paris steps back graciously as the cinema lurches forward." Dance was ultimately sidelined as "entertainment," even while it provided the forum for the enactment of the industrialized fantasy of the "dancing machine."

McCarren signals the importance of an interdisciplinary approach for her book in the introduction. Noting that cinema and dance historians have rarely crossed paths, she ventures that the turn of the century's convergence of popularized ballet, music-hall dancing, modern dance, and the new technology of film demands an increased awareness of the entwined inter-arts histories of these media. As such, cinema for McCarren functions not merely as a tool to help illuminate historical dance but as a parallel phenomenon that anticipated, developed alongside of, and eventually overtook experiments in choreography. While the broad scope of this book risks overextending its reach—McCarren invokes examples of the dancing machine trope drawn from literature, science, and the visual arts, often in rapid-fire succession—*Dancing Machines* points to several potentially rich fields of interdisciplinary inquiry.

For McCarren, the "dancing machine" that emerges from the nexus of movement and technology is a hybrid, changeable figure that invokes two simultaneous histories. The first, influenced by work-science (studies on the economization of movement, designed to increase worker output), attempts to distill the movements of the body to an energy-efficient productivity. The second anthropomorphizes the machine, reconnecting technology to its "mythic, ritual, or religious functions" (11) and granting it the capacity to channel the "motor power" of the universe. What connects these two histories is the notion of the "economy of gesture."

In McCarren's analysis, mechanization and spiritual renewal coincide in the newly technologized focus on movement at the turn of the century. Chapter One, "Economies of Gesture: Mechanics, Thermodynamics, Cinematics," and Chapter Two, "Choreocinema," both examine how the preoccupation with movement implicated dance in the field of work-science and in the development of early cinematic technologies. Citing Étienne-Jules Marey's time-motion movement studies using sequential "chronophotography," she offers an illuminating account of how cinematic precursors made the visual analysis of the components of movement possible. These technological advancements in photography, while furthering the development of film, also contributed to the disciplining of the American laborer's work habits. McCarren balances her subsequent analysis between the two histories of the machine she outlines in her first chapter and their alternating utopian and dystopic forecasts.

One of the central contradictions of modernism McCarren points to in *Dancing Machines* is the impossibility of distinguishing between the dancing machine as a critique of the industrial age and the dancing machine as an "American, cinematic, productive" utopic fantasy (37). Chapter Four, "Ballets Without Bodies" picks up on this latter articulation of the dancing machine through an analysis of the so-called "machine ballets" of the early twentieth century. The Ballets Russes, the Ballets Suédois, the Futurists, and artists and filmmakers such as Ferdinand Léger and René Clair, all created works that expressed their fascination with the possibilities of the machine. Léger's film of 1924, *Ballet mécanique,* for example, depicted everyday objects that "danced" through an animation process of film

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editing and collage. Léger's film continued a trend of figuring the combination of dance (especially the idea of dance, or dance without dancers) and the machine as the culmination of modernity (123). In this move, moreover, machinic technologies subsumed dance, removing movement from the fleshly bodies that performed it: "In *Ballet mécanique* modernity is represented as objects in maddening motion, taking on a life of their own; a revolution of the animated inanimate or abstraction of the human labeled dancing. As if dancing had been made obsolete, technology and cinema absorb its functioning" (125). While the dancing machine may have been celebrated for its potentialities, as the twentieth century progressed, its human progenitor was ultimately left behind.

Fittingly, the figure of the dancer—perhaps best represented here by Isadora Duncan, to whose life and work McCarren weaves references throughout *Dancing Machines*—also functioned in literary modernism as a symbol of a mythic, disappearing "natural" past. Chapter Three, "Abstraction," provides an example of how some artists, in contrast to Léger et al., employed dance to critique the industrial age rather than to explore its potentialities. In this chapter, McCarren delves into poetry to illustrate how literature looked to dance to find ways of writing movement in the mobilized, mechanized machine age.

In Chapters Five and Six, McCarren adds a new layer of complexity to the "dancing machine" by examining its racialized representation. At this point *Dancing Machines* ventures into its richest, and most dense, material—material whose complexity might have warranted its own separate volume, with more prose fleshing out the connections between race, dance, and technology. Chapter Five addresses how race influenced the reception of Asian performers as more machine-like, either as depersonalized automatons or as cosmically tuned "Orientals" who harnessed the forces of the universe through their "mysterious" powers. For playwrights of the Twenties and Thirties, the Asian performer often served as a signifier of the mechanization of labor and its resulting alienation and dehumanization. For instance, William Butler Yeats praised dancer Michio Ito's "detached," "super-human," and "trance-like" performance in Yeats's Noh-inspired play, *At the Hawk's Well,* using language reminiscent of the "mystical, mechanical . . . Orientalized automata of an earlier century" (137). McCarren also points out that Brecht developed his notion of the alienation effect after witnessing Chinese actor Mei Lan-fang perform in Moscow.

Chapter Six continues to examine the connections between race and machine culture, this time in the context of Josephine Baker. Simultaneously obsessed with the "primitive" and with the technological, the Parisian public of the 1920s elevated dancer Josephine Baker to stardom. As an American, Baker stood for the industrialized jazz age United States (often a symbol of the machinic in contrast to Europe); as an African American, Baker evoked an exotic, mythic, pre-technological "Africa." McCarren demonstrates that the cinema drove the rage for "primitivism" and technophilia in 1920s Paris by introducing on film African and African-American dance forms to French audiences. She also analyzes several feature films, such as *Zou Zou* (1934) and *Princesse Tam-Tam* (1935), which emphasized Baker's role as a fantasy projection of primitive naturalism. Paradoxically, Baker's "naturalness" was exhibited and made widely accessible through recording technologies that mechanized the performance of her "Africanness." Less clearly developed is McCarren's claim that the cinematization of Baker's dances helped her resist the commodification of static "primitive" art objects collected and displayed in museums such as the Institut d'Ethnologie in Paris. Although McCarren helpfully warns against the conflation of static images of Baker with her filmed performances, this insight doesn't explain why a *moving* image is less prone to commodification, or how film enabled Baker in particular to break out of the matrices of power that mediated her public image. Nevertheless, this chapter is one of McCarren's best. Through race, it draws together many of the floating discursive strands of the book: the competing definitions of, and contradictory responses to, the machinic; the strong ties between dance and labor; and the role of the cinema in making the pre-technological "primitive" easily, and ironically, consumable through technological means.

What would have fully rounded out this book is an answering of the larger significance of the various "dancing machine" artistic phenomena analyzed within its covers. McCarren might have established the linkages between the earlier visual and performing arts encounters with technology, and their contemporary manifestations as experiments involving new media. *Dancing Machines* largely leaves the task of connecting the avant-garde histories its author so painstakingly excavates to their present-day iterations up to the reader. A few more moments of reflection on the stakes of the early modern dancing machine for the development of contemporary arts practices and technologies would have helped to ground the wealth of detail McCarren provides in relation to this one time period.

Dancing Machines would be an excellent introductory text for a wide variety of courses covering modernism and the inter-arts experiments of the Parisian avant-garde. For film history courses, *Dancing Machines* would offer a helpful contextualization of early twentieth-century dance and the concern with economies of gesture that contributed to the formation of early cinema. In its coverage of a diverse array of objects, McCarren's book succeeds as an interdisciplinary mélange that is limited only by time period. While readers might wish for a more linear thesis to act as a compass through the conglomeration of disciplines, one cannot help but appreciate how deftly McCarren has reinserted dance's importance in the development of the cinema, literature, visual arts, and industry of the early twentieth century.

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Hollywood Outsiders

The Adaptation of the Film Industry, 1913-1934

By Ann Morey. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. $68.95 cloth; $22.95 paper.

In *Film History: Theory and Practice,* Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery posit four categories of film history—aesthetic, technological, economic, and social—and specify a branch of social film history that asks, "What has been the relationship between the cinema as a social institution and other social institutions?" (170). This was the approach taken, for example, by Garth Jowett's pioneering *Film: The Democratic Art* in 1975, and it's also been taken up recently by Ann Morey in her well-organized and thought-provoking study, *Hollywood Outsiders: The Adaptation of the Film Industry, 1913-1934*.

Professor Morey, who teaches at Texas A & M University, describes her focus concisely in the opening chapter:

> This book explores the ways film cultures were shaped by forces outside Hollywood, as exemplified by four case studies: juvenile series fiction spanning the period from the mid-1910s through the mid-1930s; the Palmer Photoplay Corporation as a correspondence school of the 1910s and 1920s teaching screenwriting; Catholic and Protestant incursions into Hollywood, ranging from ministerial filmmaking to major interventions such as the Production Code, from the first decade of the twentieth century through the 1930s; and high school film appreciation and character education curricula in the 1930s. (3)

Following her opening chapter, Morey devotes a chapter to each of the four case studies, then sums up her study and links it to more contemporary concerns in a conclusion.

The first two case studies look at writings that seem to offer readers the hope of upward social mobility by getting involved in the film industry. The juvenile series fiction about filmmaking was part of a larger movement in popular fiction starting in the 1910s that included more famous series, such as the Rover Boys, the Hardy Boys, and Nancy Drew. Morey studies three series written in the 1910s—Moving Picture Girls, Motion Picture Chums, and Motion Picture Comrades—as well as Moving Picture Boys (15 volumes from 1913-1922) and the most popular—the Ruth Fielding series (1913-34, thirty volumes), in which a woman succeeds as an actress, writer, director, producer, and even studio owner. The Palmer Photoplay Corporation was founded in 1918—ironically, just about the time that the market for unsolicited screenplays was drying up in Hollywood—and even moved briefly into film production between 1922 and 1924 before shifting its focus away from screenwriting and toward freelance journalism thereafter. Like the juvenile series fiction, the Palmer enterprise seemed to offer participants a look at the inner workings of the film industry and the possibility of succeeding within it.

The institutions of religion and education provide the more social, as opposed to individual, focus of the book's second half. In the chapter "Sermons in Screens," Morey contrasts the approach of some liberal Protestants, who encouraged using film as a way to discuss social problems, with that of fundamental Protestants, who tended to discourage moviegoing altogether, and with the Catholic approach, which led to the attempts to control screen content through the establishment of the PCA and the more rigorous enforcement of the Hollywood Production Code starting in 1934. Despite these divergences, the religious groups recognized the growing popularity of movies and—worrying about their own declining moral and social authority—sought ways to influence, participate in, avoid, or control the excesses of the movie industry. Finally, Morey examines the film education movement of the 1930s, designed primarily for use in high schools, which focused on two separate aims: film appreciation, "in which adolescents were asked to acquire the best possible principles of film selection and interpretation," and character education, "in which young people were asked to consider moral problems through an examination of short films," leading to "a better understanding of social and ethical action in their lives" (149). Morey sees both these approaches as alternatives to controlling film content through the Production Code: The first "hoped to ratify the sovereign individual conscience, capable of making informed decisions about film attendance," while character education could be considered a "later manifestation" of the liberal Protestant movement to see movies as a possible source of moral instruction and discussion.

The book exhibits several strengths. It is carefully thought out and structured, and the author makes frequent comparisons and cross-references throughout the text. The research into the three lesser-known areas—juvenile serial fiction, the Palmer school, and the film appreciation movement—provides new information about ways that movies brushed up with other social institutions between the 1910s and the 1930s. Morey is also a good analyst of texts, as when she contrasts how juvenile serial fiction tailored for female readers differed from that aimed at male readers, or when she discusses the elusiveness of what the Palmer correspondence school claimed to sell or offer to its students. Finally, in her conclusion she notes the interesting ways in which the institutions she studies in her book have reappeared in new forms—the Palmer screenwriting instruction, for example, morphing into a software program called StoryCraft. She also notes that the ministerial forays into filmmaking in the 1920s and 1930s have recently reappeared in what she calls "evangelical action films" like *The Omega Code* (1999) and its 2001 sequel, *Megiddo,* and, had the book not already been completed, would surely have had an interesting take on the Mel Gibson *Passion* phenomenon. (Having made these connections, the author might also have linked film appreciation and character education to various formalist and ideological approaches in current film studies education.)

Morey's insightful connections to movies and contemporary culture lead me to a constructive suggestion: the book could have benefited from some attention to the long-standing ideological tension between individualism and community in American culture. Morey observes throughout the book that her first two case studies emphasized the individual while the latter two stressed the social. Cultural analysts such as Robert Bellah have suggested that various forms of individualism in American culture have often battled with and been tempered by more social ideologies (what he calls the "biblical" and "civic republican" traditions). Reading Morey's work, I often thought of how the first two case studies were more closely connected to individualist strains in American culture and the last two to the biblical and civic republican traditions, respectively. And because the economic turbulence of the Depression helped to discredit the individualism celebrated throughout the 1920s, it seems understandable, even predictable, that the more social approaches to movies delineated in the last two case studies—the religious and educational—peaked in the 1930s. Although Morey uses a variety of frames to help explain her study—Taylorism, the importance of affect, and the emergence of "personality" in twentieth-century America, and so on—I think more attention to the conflict between individualism and the common good in American culture might have further illuminated her valuable study of the ways that the institution of movies interacted with other social institutions between the 1910s and the 1930s.

Along the same lines, I would have liked to see Morey delve more into the Taylorism and affect motifs that run throughout the book, and indicate just how widespread the film appreciation movement was. Had she taken more space, it would have been interesting to know how many screenplays by Palmer students ever made it to the screen, as well as more about all the films that were excerpted in the "Secrets of Success" series and just how teachers and students used them. But that would have required a different and much longer book. Ultimately, *Hollywood Outsiders* taught me a lot about several movie-related institutions I knew little about—especially the juvenile novels and the Palmer school—and exhibits an admirable blend of solid historical research, complexity, and clarity of argument as it explores the links between the movies and four related institutions during the early years of classic Hollywood.

Chuck Maland teaches at the University of Tennessee and is the author of, among others, *Chaplin and American Culture.*

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Erratum: Due to a formatting error, for which we apologize, the names of two Book Note authors were switched in *Film Quarterly* 58.2. Stephen Charbonneau was the author of the note on Brian Goldfarb's *Visual Pedagogy,* pages 63-64, and Richard Armstrong was the author of the note on Annette D'Agostino Lloyd's *The Harold Lloyd Encyclopedia,* page 65.

Oscar Micheaux & His Circle

African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era

Edited by Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001. $44.95.

This anthology of essays refutes the old cliché that warns of the fate of anthologies: that they lack focus and fail to find a readership and so end up on that ash-heap of publishing, the remainder tables of bookstores. Not only does *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle* maintain its focus, but combines it with a wide-ranging treatment of its subject, a long-neglected figure in the history of black filmmaking who became a belated celebrity (the Directors Guild of America gave him a posthumous award, he has a star in the "walk of fame" on Hollywood Boulevard, and a new Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame created an award in his name). Moreover, the book, in the richness and depth of treatment of its "main man," embraces so much of African-American silent moviemaking that its authors come close to creating an obligatory "go to" book for future generations of scholars.

Having written the foregoing encomium, I must, in the interest of "full disclosure," reveal a few personal connections with the book and its makers. First, I am the author of a shamelessly generous dust jacket blurb; I am also an "Indiana author," having written a book for the press 25 years ago; and I had a small role as a "commentator" in one of the earliest public sightings of this nascent book, a conference at Yale on the topic of "the Micheaux project," which was an ambitious effort to assemble a batch of silent films and other artifacts illustrative of the achievement of the man and his "circle" into a touring show meant to give them their proper due after more than a half-century of neglect. These connections stem from my own interest in the subject of Micheaux (I first saw his *Body and Soul* in, I think, 1968 or so). Decades ago, this man, then so dimly seen, so drew me into his world of "race movies" that I wrote repeatedly on the subject. Here I mean to stake no claim of "first," but only to say that this "lost man" grabbed my attention in a way that allowed me to be part of the historiography of the last half-century that led us to this heroically scaled book setting forth Micheaux's credentials as a fit subject for study.

The years of work put in by the authors of this anthology have resulted in a portrait of Micheaux that shows him as at once more rounded, linked to a wider acquaintanceship, deeply engaged by the task of making films, and always, as they said back then, ever "a good race man." The resulting depth that the book gives Micheaux might well recast him into a "sacred monster" to be reckoned with in any future history of world cinema, rather than, as he was sometimes portrayed, merely a "colored" DeMille. Do not misread me here. I remain delighted with the earliest sightings of Micheaux—the trickster, the operator, the poseur—and hope he still holds a place in future scholarship as the core being of the figure who emerges here. I liked the trick-

Morey's insightful connections to movies and contemporary culture lead me to a constructive suggestion: the book could have benefited from some attention to the long-standing ideological tension between individualism and community in American culture. Morey observes throughout the book that her first two case studies emphasized the individual while the latter two stressed the social. Cultural analysts such as Robert Bellah have suggested that various forms of individualism in American culture have often battled with and been tempered by more social ideologies (what he calls the "biblical" and "civic republican" traditions). Reading Morey's work, I often thought of how the first two case studies were more closely connected to individualist strains in American culture and the last two to the biblical and civic republican traditions, respectively. And because the economic turbulence of the Depression helped to discredit the individualism celebrated throughout the 1920s, it seems understandable, even predictable, that the more social approaches to movies delineated in the last two case studies—the religious and educational—peaked in the 1930s. Although Morey uses a variety of frames to help explain her study—Taylorism, the importance of affect, and the emergence of "personality" in twentieth-century America, and so on—I think more attention to the conflict between individualism and the common good in American culture might have further illuminated her valuable study of the ways that the institution of movies interacted with other social institutions between the 1910s and the 1930s.

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Oscar Micheaux & His Circle

African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era

Edited by Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001. $44.95.

This anthology of essays refutes the old cliché that warns of the fate of anthologies: that they lack focus and fail to find a readership and so end up on that ash-heap of publishing, the remainder tables of bookstores. Not only does *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle* maintain its focus, but combines it with a wide-ranging treatment of its subject, a long-neglected figure in the history of black filmmaking who became a belated celebrity (the Directors Guild of America gave him a posthumous award, he has a star in the "walk of fame" on Hollywood Boulevard, and a new Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame created an award in his name). Moreover, the book, in the richness and depth of treatment of its "main man," embraces so much of African-American silent moviemaking that its authors come close to creating an obligatory "go to" book for future generations of scholars.

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ster in him, the Bre'r Rabbit, that some of us stumbled on in the l960s, perhaps because I came to him after a similar picaresque life as a child of orphans, steelworker, dockworker, and a seven-year stretch as a cabdriver in the night streets of Baltimore, where I learned a code similar to that, I like to think, of the young Micheaux—that of the hustler. These first notions of Micheaux the outsider persisted after my taking a position at Morgan State College, a historically black school where many of my older colleagues regaled me with tales of Micheaux's inept novels and raffish movies that, they said, no decent black mother would allow her children to see. For me, then, he seemed more the lone wolf rather than the center of a circle; a hustler rather than an impresario; a bit of a poseur; and always, in the coinage of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a *bricoleur,* who "made do" rather than made "art." In short, my kind of hero.

First, I mean to weigh this handsome book as book, mainly because one of its finest distinctions is physical—as an artifact, as a *book*. The "editors and curators," all of whom I have known for years as collegial friends, have done a strikingly effective book qua book—beautifully turned-out halftones; sharp-edged frame enlargements; artwork from Micheaux's books; posters, flyers, and broadsheets heralding his movies; editorial and advertising art from African-American newspapers; images of the cineastes themselves in both stills and life-defining snapshots; other graphic materials. A Micheaux filmography is among the most imaginative in memory: it includes the usual stuff—production data, plot—but also, where known, playdates complete with theater name and location, press treatments, actions by censors, and incidental material such as musical accompanists (an undergraduate could write a paper using one of these entries). Necessarily brief filmographies of two of Micheaux's "circle" of rivals are also appended, one entry each for the Colored Players and the Norman Film Company. There are copious, if uneven, notes accompanying each essay, and an 11-page bibliography that does not miss much. An interesting new thing (to me, anyway) is J. Ronald Green's "timeline and bibliography" that traces Micheaux's "re-emergence." Instead of an alphabetical list of writings, the essay traces the critical fortunes of the filmmaker by decade, a device that allows the reader to see the ebb and flow of interest in Micheaux. One misses with this book only a linkage of the causation of Micheaux studies to be found in the flow of racial politics that seems a bit muted by a rigid periodization. What forces were at work, for example, that might have accounted for the drift of Micheaux scholarship: a rise in African-American activism, of black cultural nationalism, of a sublimation of the goals of the waning civil-rights movement? However, taken together, all the entries constitute an uncommonly rich trove of scholarly research that marks the book as one that every library will covet for its "X" (non-circulating) reference shelf.

Every anthology is doomed to unevenness of effort, argument, breadth, at least to some extent. Here, despite Clyde Taylor's too-brief effort to define a black aesthetic sphere, and an interview done in a personal rather than a scholarly voice with the filmmaker Arthur Jafa, a reader is left with the wish for a more collective effort to define a specifically *black* aesthetic, particularly in a book that is meant to reach outside of the academy. But once the essays enter Micheaux's ethos, a holistic aesthetic emerges *en passant* as the reader, in the role of *flâneur*, strolls through the pages. The essays—not a clinker among them—range from the prosaic to brilliantly turned gems as they cover life as Micheaux knew it. Sister Francesca Thompson's intricately worked piece linking the fabled Lafayette Players of Harlem to a larger world of race movies, Hollywood, Broadway, and the Federal Theatre of the New Deal era, is particularly compelling. In a shrewdly worked piece, Charlene Regester sketches a central ambivalence in Micheaux's life: an African-American press that often assailed him for his apparent sins—his portrayal of the seamier side of black life, his shoddy workmanship, and worst of all, his glaring indifference to a Hollywood aesthetic while declining to assert one of his own. An old friend once recounted the impact of this aspect of Micheaux's reputation among the black bourgeoisie: he could watch any number of Hollywood "B" Westerns at the Regent on "the avenue"—Pennsylvania Avenue in Baltimore—but was obliged to slip furtively into the Biddle on a side-street to see a Micheaux movie.

Predictably, the authors are at the top of their form when treating their subject and his work. The core of *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle* that focuses on his works achieves a high order of both analysis and historicity. The least persuasive argument—indeed it is barely asserted—is the notion that Micheaux lived life amidst a "circle" of colleagues or intellectual friends in the same sense that Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Carl Van Vechten, James Weldon Johnson, or Henry James lived within such "circles." Actually, in the "biographies" of various firms that rivaled Micheaux—the Norman Company of Florida, the Colored Players of Philadelphia, and others—the argument for a circle helps bring to life moviemakers who never matched his prolific output but who provided the "antagonistic cooperation" that good competition made possible.

Phyllis Klotman's fine piece on the Norman firm, resting as it does on paper documentation of the firm in the Black Film Study Center at Indiana University (of which Klotman was founding director), actually reveals a "Micheaux connection" between the two producers. In much the same way, Charles Musser, co-chair of Film Studies at Yale, finds traces of a link between Micheaux and the Colored Players in the same collection, but it was more a waspish stocktaking of their rivalry than an expression of respectful competition, although in the end Musser reckons that at moments their two styles of film "appear in conscious dialogue" with each other. Yet such arcs form only an ephemeral Micheaux circle that often eludes other contributors.

The dogged research of Gloria J. Gibson (of the faculty of Folklore and Ethnomusicology of Indiana), for example, turned up the fewest traces of a "circle," mainly because the two figures whose oeuvre she takes up were simply in another line of work. Eloyce Gist was a traveling

evangelist who used her own all but lost films to limn a wicked world through which African Americans traveled on a *Hell Bound Train,* ever in struggle between free will and a bad end. And Gibson's Zora Neale Hurston was immersed in her own personal films of black Floridians as a pioneering ethnography grounded in her study of Franz Boas's "cultural relativism" which he and *his* circle at Columbia University (whose ranks also included Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict) used to undermine "scientific" racism. While linked to Micheaux through their common medium of *black* cinematography, the two women worked at their distinctive trades far from his scrabbling world of cinema and commerce. So we might say they shared a common sphere, if not his actual "circle." Indeed, we might say this of the subjects of each of the essays purporting to reveal a substantive Micheaux circle. But the point remains a minor one in this major work.

How might we heft the weight of this big, richly caparisoned book and somehow reckon its place in the canon of African-American historiography? Sadly, all historians share a common fate: as the late scholar and colleague, August Meier, once told me, if one's work stays in print for 25 years that is a fair measure of its impact on one's field (and its place in the cultural canon). If *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle* were a racehorse, I would bet that it should easily go this distance and take its place in the canon both as a compendium that marks the scholarly achievement of its age and as indicator of work still to be taken up, yet also as a readable and accessible book in the current literature.

Thomas Cripps is University Distinguished Professor, Emeritus, at Morgan State University, the author of numerous books and articles, as well as sole writer for the internationally acclaimed film *Black Shadows on a Silver Screen* (1976).

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Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film

The Uses of Nostalgia

By Vera Dika. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003. $70.00 cloth; $24.99 paper.

Modernism's revision of canonical images and texts has prompted many to ask whether postmodern practices are capable of staging their own coherent critique. These debates have localized around questions of history. After all, pastiche, the trademark of postmodern art practice, involves imitation and a saturation of images divested of their narrative identities. For Fredric Jameson, the nostalgia film is the epitome of this cultural practice, presenting past images with defaced contexts that create a nonnegotiable barrier between history and contemporary viewers. In a persuasive new study, Vera Dika confronts Jameson's formulation of the nostalgia film, and argues that many contemporary films have staged "sites of resistance" which rupture the "ahistorical surfaces" of pastiche (2).

Several film historians have explored post-classical Hollywood cinema's capacity for deliberately critical historical perspectives (whether modern or postmodern), but they have lacked Dika's unique concentration on the recycled film image as an embodiment of resistance. Rather than looking for the subversion of historical "evidence," multiple points of view, and conflicts between text and image, Dika relies on cinema's own innate historical parameters: the visual traces of Hollywood genres and stars that have recurred in films since the 1970s. Dika's decision to contain the historical referents within cinema's own fragmented past images is a brilliant way of grasping the essence of postmodern historical practice. As she writes, "The image returns not as a representation of the natural real, but as simulacral, as a copy of copies whose original has been lost" (3). Her methodology balances postmodernism's nostalgia for remote, classic images and its disjunctive relationship to history with the photographic/film images' own meditations on "temporality and textuality." As Dika notes, the contemporaneous avant-garde also appropriated and transformed classic film images (the film stills of Cindy Sherman), but mainstream cinema's participation in this practice—an intersection between "high art" and popular culture—reveals a new way of locating film's potential for subversion and critique.

Dika's sampling of nostalgia films is eclectic, startling, and even abrasive. *Badlands* (1973), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *The Shootist* (1976), *American Graffiti* (1973), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1988), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *One From the Heart* (1982) are among the more prominent. Some of her selections from the 1970s were also included in Noël Carroll's 1982 survey of non-critical "allusionist" films and Robert Kolker's demythifying "cinema of loneliness" (1980, 1988). Both studies analyzed the genre reworking of post-classical Hollywood cinema, but Dika takes them to task for eliding the work of more modernist genre filmmakers like Sam Peckinpah and Robert Altman with the postmodern reuse of old genres by Terrence Malick (*Badlands*) and Francis Ford Coppola (*Apocalypse Now, One From the Heart*). According to Dika, while the former were bent on working against the persistent tradition of classical Hollywood with stark revisions of the Western (*The Wild Bunch,* 1969) and the musical (*Nashville,* 1975), Malick and Coppola returned to an already dead and dismantled classical cinema system.

Yet, in spite of Dika's finely wrought argument, the distinction between modern and postmodern practice is slim, and brings to mind Philip Rosen's question of whether postmodernism ever constituted a decisive break with modernist film narratives. For Dika, the Western, the musical, the iconic rebels (James Dean) and goddesses (Marilyn Monroe), all have to be dead for postmodern nostalgia to be possible.

This revival negotiates the heart of Dika's critical resistance: the way past images collide with contemporary

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culture. *Recycled Culture* recovers these sites of displacement and critical opposition in a series of lucid and imaginative readings, from *Badlands* to Gus Van Sant's return to *Psycho* (2000). Many of these postmodern moments occur when the grown-up 1970s generation looks back on the 1950s and the historical rupture of President Kennedy's assassination in 1963. As Dika points out, Malick's nostalgia for the 1960s is consistently corrupted by the narration in *Badlands*. She cleverly returns to the Dean image (Kit/Martin Sheen) and his transformation from rebel to sociopath. Yet *Giant,* the classic George Stevens film *Badlands* invokes, also possesses elements of historical dislocation. It too represents looking back, this time of the 1950s on the Depression era in Texas, but its bleak Hopperesque landscapes confound any uncomplicated (read "classical") revisitation of a past era. *The Shootist* may show clips of old John Wayne films to illustrate the death of Western film history, but what would Dika make of Darryl Zanuck's reuse of old footage in *The Return of Frank James* (1940), or other classic filmmakers' frequent reuse of *Jazz Singer* (1927) footage? Dika carefully avoids these potential ruptures in her exclusive postmodern formulation, and instead concentrates on an astonishing variety of genre displacements: *Psycho* (1960) and its cannibalistic offspring, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; *The Shootist*'s embalming of John Wayne and the Western; the sexual purification of *Grease*'s 1950s; and the destabilization of the ontology of the photographic image and historical narrative in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988).

Dika's *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film* is challenging, original, and articulate, but like most impressive theories of film, raises as many questions as it answers. One of her major claims for a photographic image-based analysis is the connection between the modernist, high art practice of foregrounding the apparatus (*Man with a Movie Camera,* [1929]) and its disturbing historical transformations in postmodernism. Although she acknowledges that mainstream Hollywood cinema has participated in these practices (*Sherlock Jr.* [1924] and *Citizen Kane* [1941]), Dika is unwilling to see classical cinema's potential for critique and its disjunctive relationship with the past. But don't *Citizen Kane* and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) embody a self-reflexivity that is also deeply tied to the impossible recovery of a lost past, whether it's a heroic Lincoln Republic or a silent Golden Age? Is it possible that Hollywood genre films contain traces of modernist revisionism and postmodern dislocation and recovery? After all, while Dika's final chapter surveys Hollywood's recent acceleration of remakes, Hollywood has always been self-consciously dependent on re-visioning old images. Postmodernism and the nostalgia film have certainly redefined the baby-boom generation's relationship with the fissure dividing the innocent, pre-November 1963 America and a nation torn by war and political disillusionment, but doesn't every film redefine its past in relation to a disjunctive and unstable present? This was originally a modern historian's idea (Frederick Jackson Turner).

Recycled Culture is incisive, theoretically challenging, and ambitious. Dika's close analysis of a variety of post-1970 films is astonishing in its range of photographic and historical depths. While her periodization and containment of classic genres may raise some eyebrows, in *Recycled Culture* she has redefined the standard of scholarship in the theories of film and history.

J.E. Smyth is a doctoral candidate in Film Studies and American Studies at Yale University. Smyth's work has appeared in *Rethinking History, Film and History,* and *Film Quarterly*.

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Book Notes

Contributors: **Richard John Ascárate** is finishing a doctoral dissertation at UC Berkeley on the German representation of Latin America in literature and film from the early modern to the postmodern eras. **Jan-Christopher Horak** is founding editor of *The Moving Image*.

Herzog, Werner. *Eroberung des Nutzlosen*. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004. EUR 21,50. Director Werner Herzog, best known for the New German Cinema masterpieces *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), has said that his written works will outlive his films. *Eroberung des Nutzlosen* (*Conquest of the Useless*), a record the director kept while filming *Fitzcarraldo*, lends credibility to the claim. Penned over two decades ago in a miniscule, nearly indecipherable hand, some pages smeared and fixed together by tropical heat and damp, the volume is neither diary nor working journal but a "landscape born of the delirium of the jungle" (6). Herzog aficionados will find here little technical information and few behind-the-camera anecdotes the director has not made available before in numerous interviews (the most comprehensive collection of which remains Paul Cronin's *Herzog on Herzog* [2003]). But Herzog's often surreal observations, impressions, and musings both before and during filming in Peru make the account unique. Whether in Francis Ford Coppola's San Francisco home or in a Peruvian cantina, the director exhibits a keen eye and marvelous detachment. His lyrical irony suggests a felicitous blending of Rainer Maria Rilke and Charles Bukowski, while the images his prose conjures attain cinematic clarity. The reader quickly understands how Herzog can create films with only a tentative script and no storyboards. He describes, for example, native butchers ineptly slaughtering a pig, the beast's screams driving a pink lung from its pierced side. A kitten slowly expires in muck, hind legs outstretched and spittle bubbling from the muzzle, while chickens pluck at the warm flesh. A young boy is presented to Herzog for adoption; five years old, naked, and named Wagner, the child has neither father nor mother, the author is told, only his shadow.

One day toward the end of shooting, an exhausted Herzog writes that he can express himself only in strained

culture. *Recycled Culture* recovers these sites of displacement and critical opposition in a series of lucid and imaginative readings, from *Badlands* to Gus Van Sant's return to *Psycho* (2000). Many of these postmodern moments occur when the grown-up 1970s generation looks back on the 1950s and the historical rupture of President Kennedy's assassination in 1963. As Dika points out, Malick's nostalgia for the 1960s is consistently corrupted by the narration in *Badlands*. She cleverly returns to the Dean image (Kit/Martin Sheen) and his transformation from rebel to sociopath. Yet *Giant,* the classic George Stevens film *Badlands* invokes, also possesses elements of historical dislocation. It too represents looking back, this time of the 1950s on the Depression era in Texas, but its bleak Hopperesque landscapes confound any uncomplicated (read "classical") revisitation of a past era. *The Shootist* may show clips of old John Wayne films to illustrate the death of Western film history, but what would Dika make of Darryl Zanuck's reuse of old footage in *The Return of Frank James* (1940), or other classic filmmakers' frequent reuse of *Jazz Singer* (1927) footage? Dika carefully avoids these potential ruptures in her exclusive postmodern formulation, and instead concentrates on an astonishing variety of genre displacements: *Psycho* (1960) and its cannibalistic offspring, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; *The Shootist*'s embalming of John Wayne and the Western; the sexual purification of *Grease*'s 1950s; and the destabilization of the ontology of the photographic image and historical narrative in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988).

Dika's *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film* is challenging, original, and articulate, but like most impressive theories of film, raises as many questions as it answers. One of her major claims for a photographic image-based analysis is the connection between the modernist, high art practice of foregrounding the apparatus (*Man with a Movie Camera,* [1929]) and its disturbing historical transformations in postmodernism. Although she acknowledges that mainstream Hollywood cinema has participated in these practices (*Sherlock Jr.* [1924] and *Citizen Kane* [1941]), Dika is unwilling to see classical cinema's potential for critique and its disjunctive relationship with the past. But don't *Citizen Kane* and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) embody a self-reflexivity that is also deeply tied to the impossible recovery of a lost past, whether it's a heroic Lincoln Republic or a silent Golden Age? Is it possible that Hollywood genre films contain traces of modernist revisionism and postmodern dislocation and recovery? After all, while Dika's final chapter surveys Hollywood's recent acceleration of remakes, Hollywood has always been self-consciously dependent on re-visioning old images. Postmodernism and the nostalgia film have certainly redefined the baby-boom generation's relationship with the fissure dividing the innocent, pre-November 1963 America and a nation torn by war and political disillusionment, but doesn't every film redefine its past in relation to a disjunctive and unstable present? This was originally a modern historian's idea (Frederick Jackson Turner).

Recycled Culture is incisive, theoretically challenging, and ambitious. Dika's close analysis of a variety of post-1970 films is astonishing in its range of photographic and historical depths. While her periodization and containment of classic genres may raise some eyebrows, in *Recycled Culture* she has redefined the standard of scholarship in the theories of film and history.

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One day toward the end of shooting, an exhausted Herzog writes that he can express himself only in strained

half-sentences, as if hopping over a brook from one slippery rock to another. Two leitmotivs haunt almost all 330 pages of entries: Herzog's monumental determination to see his film project through and his quiet melancholy over the compulsion to do so. The title notwithstanding, *Eroberung des Nutzlosen* reminds the reader of the great sacrifices required to produce great art.

Richard John Ascárate

The Film Preservation Guide. The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums (San Francisco, CA: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004). Founded through an Act of Congress in 1996, the National Film Preservation Foundation was created in order to raise private monies to support film preservation activities in the United States, specifically to fund the preservation and restoration of so-called orphaned films (all those films not controlled by copyright holders). Since its inception, the NFPF has funded preservation in 36 states and the District of Columbia and helped save more than 690 films and collections. It has also made many of these newly preserved films accessible through a DVD collection, *Treasures from American Archives,* released in 2001 and premiered on Turner Classic Movies, while a second DVD set was released in September, 2004.

Its impact has, however, been much greater than these modest numbers indicate, since the NFPF can be credited with completely changing the film preservation landscape. Before its founding, only a handful of American film archives were receiving Federal grants for preservation—mostly for mainstream Hollywood features. Since then, numerous American archives, historical societies, university libraries, and other non-profits have been encouraged to look at their film collections and consider their aesthetic, cultural, and social significance. The result has been an explosion in preservation consciousness, even in many institutions previously not associated with film archiving.

It is for this latter group that the NFPF has now published *The Film Preservation Guide,* a primer in the world of film archives for librarians, museum curators, and other keepers of film collections who have some archival training, but no specific knowledge of the details of film conservation, preservation, and restoration. The guide is a very handy tool indeed, and even specialists may want to use it as a quick reference, since in our steadily evolving field, technical standards are in a constant state of flux. In nine separate chapters, the *Guide* discusses film preservation definitions, technical specifications, film handling, curatorship, duplication, storage, cataloguing, legal issues, and access. The comments are concise and to the point. Illustrations, graphs, and spreadsheets augment the very readable text. The appendices, which include an edge code chart, lists of labs and vendors, and a glossary of terms, make this an excellent source for anyone interested in film preservation, including those who may not remember that moving images were once on celluloid. The publication is available free of charge from NFPF (with an $8.00 shipping charge), or it can be downloaded at www.filmpreservation.org.

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